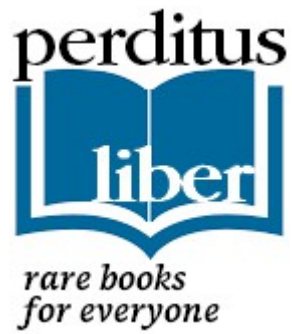


# THE VISITANT





Perditus Liber Presents  
the



OCLC: 7415612

book:

## **The Visitant**

by

Ludwig Tügel

*Translated by*  
Norman Gullick

Published 1931

*Translated from the German, by*  
NORMAN GULLICK

# THE VISITANT

*by* LUDWIG TÜGEL

LONDON: MARTIN SECKER

Der Wiedergänger

*Copyright*

FRANKFORT: RÜTTEN & LOENING VERLAG, 1929

LONDON: MARTIN SECKER LTD. 1931

# CONTENTS

## PART ONE

Chapter One  
Chapter Two  
Chapter Three  
Chapter Four  
Chapter Five  
Chapter Six

## PART TWO

Chapter Seven  
Chapter Eight  
Chapter Nine  
Chapter Ten  
Chapter Eleven  
Chapter Twelve

## PART THREE

Chapter Thirteen  
Chapter Fourteen  
Chapter Fifteen  
Chapter Sixteen  
Chapter Seventeen  
Chapter Eighteen  
Chapter Nineteen

## PART FOUR

Chapter Twenty  
Chapter Twenty-One  
Chapter Twenty-Two  
Chapter Twenty-Three  
Chapter Twenty-Four  
Chapter Twenty-Five

## PART FIVE

Chapter Twenty-Six  
Chapter Twenty-Seven  
Chapter Twenty-Eight  
Chapter Twenty-Nine  
Chapter Thirty  
Chapter Thirty-One

## PART SIX

Chapter Thirty-Two  
Chapter Thirty-Three  
Chapter Thirty-Four  
Chapter Thirty-Five  
Chapter Thirty-Six

## PART SEVEN

Chapter Thirty-Seven  
Chapter Thirty-Eight  
Chapter Thirty-Nine  
Chapter Forty  
Chapter Forty-One  
Chapter Forty-Two

## PART EIGHT

Chapter Forty-Three  
Chapter Forty-Four  
Chapter Forty-Five  
Chapter Forty-Six

## PART ONE

## CHAPTER I

THE days were hot and oppressive; even at night the air seemed no cooler, and the Zamells were passing the evenings on the veranda.

They had been married five years, and their only child was a healthy boy of four. This child was a source of happiness to them; but it was a happiness which they seemed to forget as soon as they became aware of it, and already they had ceased to notice whether they were conscious of it or not. For there was a constant reaction between them which, as it were, consumed them—a state of such unrest that only by effort and wearisome forbearance could the peace be kept.

Often it seemed to the husband that this forbearance was too great an emotional sacrifice for whatever relief it brought, and the happiness which sometimes rewarded him was, he felt, like an invalid who asked for nothing more than to be treated with kindness, indifferent alike to recovery or to death.

What hurt him was that he had believed things might have been so different. When he could review the state of affairs reasonably he strove to be resigned. But that was what he never could be; at least, was what he could never quite succeed in being. He might, indeed, pull himself together and force himself to hope that what had not yet happened might still come to pass. Yet already five years of hope and unfulfilment had come and gone.

He had been firmly set upon marriage, was indeed still so, but the will alone could not make a success of it. There was lacking between him and his wife the inner spiritual magic which alone brings the will to its fruition. It was a sad business, commonplace and sad.

7

The impossibility of living alone had been one of the delusions of his bachelorhood. Living in single strictness, his body frozen into subjection, he had believed passionately that isolation would chill the soul. It was a stupidly distorted view of the true state of affairs. Oh, that imagined solitude of the bachelor! How much more solitary had marriage made him by his wife's persistent unrest! Yet her unrest was a condition which some



had called interesting and good; good, that is to say, because of its contrast with the dull monotony of everyday life.

But Herr Zamell said: "All mankind is in a fever nowadays. If only Elisabeth were an exception ! If only she could be at peace! Five years of ever-gnawing pain—what an eternity it seems!"

"Our beings never seem to meet," said Eric Zamell. "We live side by side without touching. I love Elisabeth, for me there is no other woman. Perhaps—I feel it often—I want everything, want too much from her. I am like the sea beating for ever upon the shore: the tide creeps forward, the waves surge up the beach and flow back—so I keep moving towards her. Either I demand too much from her or she demands too little from me. But no—it's not that she wants too little; she wants something other than I have to give her, as I want something she cannot give. That is the truth of the matter. For five years I have been too cowardly to confess that we don't understand one another. Ah, if only there were such a thing as understanding! I still long for her—to my cost, for I know how senseless it is to ask for understanding. Everything in life witnesses against it. Perhaps I ought to acquiesce, but can I? I am striving to bear things with composure. It's all a question of attitude."

But Elisabeth Zamell was suffering too. She suffered because her husband suffered. She said: "He has no peace.

8

He is jealous." To which he replied: "Not at all. Any ground, even the smallest, that I have for jealousy raises me above her. It is, rather, that I seek something with intensity."

Nothing could have been so characteristic of Eric Zamell as this confession. It was evidence of a state of feeling named hypersensitiveness. Some thick-skinned person had once called him a "sensitive fellow." Eric did not bother himself about such remarks although they made an impression on his wife. He belonged to the educated class of Lammsdorf, and he could bring himself to speak of his troubles to no one but Elisabeth. What he desired for himself was quietude and happiness, the good fortune of a marriage which, despite the twentieth century, should still be a marriage.

Elisabeth was made unhappy by this exacting view of marriage. She had to recognize it, she could not gainsay it. But one had still, she told herself, one's own life to live. So she would listen with an air of agreement while

he explained to her what he conceived to be the nature of marriage, only remarking now and then “You are quite right” or “That’s just what I think.”

Elisabeth was fond of music; and the ridiculous fact must be admitted that Eric, while believing that one could be diverted or improved by art, none the less secretly feared her devotion to it.

All people who crave for love are given to self-torture. Eric never surrendered his spiritual high-tension; it was a load from which he could never escape. He forgot it during the hours of love, but what a dangerous game that was! What a game of hide-and-seek!

Elisabeth had attempted to become the old-fashioned sort of wife, but in nothing had she failed so completely. She couldn’t dress for the part. But that was what her husband desired—he wanted to transform her into something quite

9

different; and he became afraid when he saw in her the grave of all his wishes.

He had never been lacking in intelligence and reason. But his wishes were more powerful than his reason, they were indeed more reasonable than reason itself. His wife had grown to fear this reason of his. His desires asked everything of her, while his reason asked nothing. A worse thing could not happen to a wife, if her husband were a man of wealth and position.

As she faced his demands, she feared only the final, terrifying nearness of him, when eye looks into eye. Viewed from a distance the things he desired of her seemed to be good, they seemed indeed to invest her with a halo of nobility and courage which kindled within her a feeling of immortality. But, regarded by the cold light of day, this heroic form resembled nothing better than a posture of misshapen limbs; and each man who smiled at her discomfiture awoke in her a craving for freedom.

It was plain to see that Elisabeth was suffering no less than Eric; and people in Lammsdorf said that she was sick for life, while he was sick of it.

10

## CHAPTER II

**I**T was hot and oppressive weather, and on the twenty-fourth of June, in the fierce heat of noon, Elisabeth lay resting on the veranda couch. In an easy chair beside her Eric sat smoking while she read.

Suddenly he spoke: "How beautiful you are!"

She smiled, her eyes glancing past him for a few seconds before they returned to her book. Her face had an expression of tense interest. Eric smoked his cigarette until there was only the stump to toss away. Again he said simply: "How beautiful you are!"

Apparently she was too interested in her reading to hear what he was saying. Once more he repeated, "How very beautiful you are!" and his hand passed in a caress over her body, not with passion, but as though involuntarily. And then, before even the motion of his hand had ceased, there escaped him once or twice a faint groan that yet could be distinctly heard. Elisabeth lay motionless and read.

His words and the short half-smothered groans were the expression of a terrible and agonizing passion. Elisabeth paid no attention, her body was unresponsive to the caress, the groan remained unanswered. She had her book to read.

With an air of irritation he jumped to his feet. At last she put her book aside, put it aside with a gesture of boredom, and glanced at him with an indolent smile.

"Do you still love me?" he asked.

She yawned a little and replied: "You know that well enough."

Already she had reached out for her book when he seized it from her hand. With a crash it was flung against the veranda door. Then she raised herself up from the couch.

11

"What is the meaning of that?" she asked.

"What a question!" he answered. "What does it mean? It ought to tell you that no one can put up with *that*."

He strode up and down the veranda while she gazed at him with estrangement and anger in her eyes.

"I can bear no more of it!" he cried, clenching his fists.

“What can you bear no more of?”

What could the poor fellow retort to that? There was nothing that could be said, at all events at such a moment. The right words to express despair cannot be chosen in the very midst of agitation. Eric stood as though rooted to the floor and gazed at her. Then he said: “You know well enough. Look into yourself! What am I to say to you? You know better than I what’s the matter with you.”

He had spoken with composure, but the tremulous intonation of ebbing excitement gave to his voice something of the deathly quietness of despair.

Elisabeth tried to arise. She had already put one foot to the floor when he rushed at her and, snatching at her wrists, forced her downwards to the couch. She strove to escape, to defend herself, her eyes blazing with anger, but he overpowered her and cried as he shook her:

“For once you shall understand the injustice you do me. No power in the world will then suffer you or excuse you. Why do you bind and fetter me, if you cannot release me? What have I done that you should treat me so?”

He shook her till she moaned.

“Why do you not free yourself from the world? You treat your whims as though they were your very soul. You use and misuse people, just to be something or display something for which I care nothing. How often I’ve told you this! How often I’ve begged you to be different! Why don’t you? Haven’t you any desire to be different? Oh, you don’t want to be, you can’t!—I know that. You haven’t

12

a notion of how a man’s soul can hunger for deliverance and fulfilment. Why have you made me hunger? You do not realise that there comes a time when a woman must cease to be merely beautiful and pleasing. I mean you to be good, I want you to be good, but my wishes are nothing to you, they seek in vain to reach your heart—all your trivialities block the road. Don’t you know how hateful beauty can become? Don’t you know how often and how thoroughly you turn my heart away from you? You force me to shout into your ear what blood or heart or eternity should tell you: that beauty must become noble, if it is to remain beauty at all. Or it remains a gypsy-beauty, wandering the world and making it still more restless. In your presence love must sicken; it dies, destroyed by your beauty, and ceases to be love; it perishes because you remain eternally what you are, what you

have been: conquering the world, enslaving mankind, instead of redeeming it. Moments instead of eternity!”

He shook her with increasing violence. A feeble cry escaped her.

“Why aren’t you frightened?” he screamed. “Don’t you understand what I am shouting into your ears? Oh, God ... your heart and soul too weak, too insensitive ... but I feel it will yet happen, it will yet happen!”

His voice died suddenly away. Releasing Elisabeth’s hands, his own, heavy as lead, sank in exhaustion. It was as if he had become aware that his words were making no impression on his wife or one that he did not intend. For Elisabeth was quite naturally afraid that he had lost his reason. So, to stave off another fit of violence, she kissed him. Eric Zamell, the soap manufacturer of Lammsdorf, responded to this kiss with passionate abandon. A long and close embrace followed, wherein they persuaded one another that each was at last what the other really desired.

13

Then Eric Zamell stood up, walked over to the veranda railings and ... groaned once more. He had been comforted—for the space of a few minutes. But now when he could no longer feel the pressure of Elisabeth’s arms around him the old trouble returned. It was all so purposeless. She wasn’t really different, she couldn’t be different. The traits of her character were fixed for ever: that shallowness of mood, that accursed frivolity, that irresponsibility of soul. She couldn’t be different, it wasn’t in her. He had told her what he expected of her; it was no longer a wish, a hope or a belief, but a demand. Yet she would never be anything different: that was the fact from which he could find no way of escape.

Up and down the veranda he strode. Then again he stood still above the steps and stared down into the garden below. Suddenly, without a word, he hurried away to his factory.

Elisabeth stretched herself out on the couch as if with weariness, sadness or boredom. It would have been hard to say which.

14

### CHAPTER III

**I**T was hot and oppressive weather, the atmosphere seemed like a glowing fire.

Hard is the lot of the unsatisfied! The weariness of the exhausted body torments the restless soul. Oh, the torture of hopelessness! There is a time of unnatural calm when everything presses towards the decisive moment. The cool of evening brings no refreshment to the soul which, consumed by feverish unrest, cannot find consolation in the passing hours. Sleep is unthinkable.

The Zamells passed half the night in talking, if only it could be called talking. Their conversation was a wrangle and it had become a habit with them.

Eric Zamell delighted in argument; it gave him a feeling of superiority. But that was not the only reason: he liked Elisabeth's vigorous resistance, whereby she laid bare in self-revelation the white blood of her soul and provoked him to go on believing in her love, no matter how real their inward and outward estrangement might be. It was the cruel game of a husband who summoned every device of thought to rescue his sinking hopes and to lighten the darkness where in his bewildered emotions were astray.

The Zamells were weighing up their love for each other, searching back to the day when they had first met. Eric had inherited the factory from his father, a shrewd man of business. It was a prosperous concern now directed by an elderly manager, Eric's former guardian. Eric himself was not cut out for business. He was a man of ideals, so he persuaded himself. The ideals were all humbug, for he himself trampled on them, and he was unaware of the untold strength a genuine ideal possesses. He deceived himself with

regard to his own hopes and desires; even his greatest passion, the longing for a perfect marriage, had miscarried.

Until Eric was eighteen the need of belief had been stronger than the stirring of reason and he had retained a steadfast faith in God. Then came a time when his intelligence triumphed over every feeling. He became a scoffer, as does any man who fails to live in harmony with his powers and

exalts or warps his reason at the cost of his emotions, since both stupidity and emotional poverty are human limitations. Eric had been a youth to whom nothing remained sacred. Love, marriage, friendship, family, all had seemed to him folly and humbug, the luxuries of fools. How far his thinking was logical he did not know, and it did not occur to him that his mockery and sarcasm were an expression of the age. He was experiencing within himself the deterioration of a time lacking in all culture, and he had first become aware of it in making the acquaintance of a girl who had appealed to him more than all others because she was clever. Their first conversations had been marked by scorn of emotion, sentiment, love and marriage. Perhaps that was to be expected. She was sharp-witted and followed with facility the train of his thought. But their attitude to one another did not remain thus for long. Surrendering himself more and more to the emotions which the girl's presence kindled in him, he fell deeply in love with her. The period of his mockery was at an end. He changed his attitude abruptly. He became earnest, thoughtful, introspective. He began to respect the girl. The deeper needs of his being, for which his developing temperament demanded satisfaction, were not to be denied; and if the girl could have seen in his severity and reserve an evidence of self-understanding, if she could have responded to it, he would have been above all things fortunate.

But, on the contrary, she was irritated by the respect with

16

which he regarded her. It was love that her temperament demanded, and she failed to realise that this love could only reach her indirectly through the adoration of this once sarcastic mocker. His chastity and the unwonted strength of his newly-kindled tenderness seemed to her a paradoxical, clumsy and distasteful inadequacy. As she became aware of something lacking, so she began to find him dull, tiresome and yet, because of her emotional need, doubly desirable. But instead of trying to master the inconsistency of her emotion or to explain it to him, she let him feel that he was tiresome and uncongenial to her. From a sense of false shame she was silent about her vacillating condition, and stood on the defensive against him when she should have stood on the defensive against herself. She conceived it her duty to be entirely frank with him, but she was only partially so, concealing from him all those impulses which, had he known

of them, would have enabled him to help her. Thus he was deeply wounded and more than wounded by the explanation that she gave of herself.

He called this emotional disillusionment his *Knax*, a word which he had found in Ibsen. The expression was no exaggeration, for, no matter how trifling and insignificant this experience might otherwise have been, it was for him, after his transformation, something formidable; and he was in such matters too raw and dense to put it away from him without suffering. Her avowal made him scornful of the feminine sex. His adoration, his most sacred emotion, was repulsed and injured. He could now laugh sceptically over love and all that concerned it. He could despise every feeling in himself and others. He was like a wild beast waiting for its prey: ready to kill with scorn every soft emotion that might stir within him, ready to lay bare the extravagance, the unaccountableness and the futility of every incipient feeling. He scrutinized himself and everyone

17

around him, and thus, without ever practising love, he gained a knowledge of it and of the human heart, which, with his experience and shrewdness, would have been worthy of a much older man. But one day, four years later, the fire broke out once more in his heart. He had become acquainted with a married woman—the girl of former days was now a wife. They came to an understanding only too quickly. She was unhappily married, and her husband no less than herself had long been impatient for freedom. Eric's reappearance only served to hasten the divorce which was sued for and pronounced shortly afterwards. He and Elisabeth were married immediately, without any religious ceremony, and with the reservation that their marriage should last just so long as they loved one another. Neither wished to tie the other to a more binding arrangement.

But now with the feeling of love for Elisabeth there awoke once more in Eric the urge towards veneration. He loved and revered her, but not quite as formerly. He loved with a reservation. He no longer believed that he dared, or should, or could love unreservedly. Yet his heart, or soul, or whatever one calls it, yearned intensely for veneration. He wished that the object of his adoration should be without blemish, without a shade of blameworthiness. His emotion surged towards his wife as in a flood of religious fervour, full of devotion, of sanctification, of pure passionate love.

To him Elisabeth was a sort of deity. She was his cult: he adored her, with the adoration of a love that shrank from nothing, vast, strong, intimate,



elemental, a love which, up to a certain point, was selfless, since it sought nothing for itself. Gladly would he have died with her a death of love. But if she had now taken in his heart the place that once was God's, might she not at the same time lead him into temptation?

Whether she did so or not, that he felt it to be possible

18

was unholiness enough for him. That he wanted to die with her was the loftiest expression of his devotion. It was, indeed, all beyond her understanding; consequently, the force of his erotic endeavour soon grew feeble, crushed by the irony of unattainability.

He became afraid of death, and with every outburst of his love the fear increased. An uncanny feeling took possession of him at this time—it was towards the end of the third year of his married life—a feeling which could be described only as fright and which produced in him a three-fold depression. First, he began to feel ill without knowing why. He believed his death to be imminent. This clearly arose from his realising the futility of his emotion: he had lost the immortality that love should have given him.

Then, as he became reconciled to the prospect of an early death, he recognized, with the shock of first awareness, the frailty of earthly things. He had lost the sense of living.

From these two phases in his spiritual life there followed, as the premonition of approaching death proved deceptive, the third phase: an outward reconciliation with his fate, a desolate acquiescence in a not remote death of which his wife would somehow be the cause. This apprehension became stronger and he began to be on his guard against Elisabeth.

Thus there came about the first collisions in the life of the Zamells. Their attitude naturally hardened as time went on. They recognized with the passage of years those sinister signposts of disaster which are to be seen in every third marriage nowadays and in every fifth are the portents of inevitable divorce.

19

## CHAPTER IV

**H**OT and depressing were the days, the nights no longer brought relief. The stars looked hostile above the sweltering world.

The summer nights of Lammsdorf seemed to heighten the sense of solitude. From the row of houses that lay behind the garden the sounds of music—gramophone, wireless, trumpet, piano—continued far into the night. Each house had its particular form of torture, of which its residents seemed to be proud: the crying of children, domestic quarrelling, or the noisy celebration of a birthday.

Nothing affected the nerves of Elisabeth Zamell so acutely as these noises. She was reading Balzac. The book was *Père Goriot*, and she thought the excellent old fellow was an arrant fool. But Eric took an odd pleasure in the concert that came from the row of houses; it interested him more than his own factory, it awakened in him memories of his childhood, reviving the little sentimentalities of which, though one need not be ashamed, one has no cause to be proud. So the sounds stirred pleasurably the chords of his anguished soul, kindling a vague and dreamy melancholy to which he surrendered himself willingly. The hard, harsh feeling of infinite forlornness, engendered by his wife's presence, was softened. It was as though the lives of other people brought comfort into his own: other people thought and felt as he did, like-minded, like-fated, brother-sufferers.

When, for example, the gramophone began to play in house number four, where, for hours at a time, the people wrangled, shouted, and finally, so it seemed, came to blows; when the gramophone began to play—always the same record, for apparently they had only one, the Minuet by Boccherini—

20

then. Eric Zamell became almost light-hearted, he whistled the melody, and when it ceased would cry "*Da capo!*" It happened that this record was played five or six times, and Eric pictured to himself a devoted family life with happy hours of comradeship or love, or at least the harmonious company of two people. He never guessed that the husband was assuaging his loneliness, while the wife was spending her time away.

The summer nights in Lammsdorf sharpened the sense of being alone. Both husband and wife suffered from this feeling of forsakenness. Elisabeth's only friend at the time of her marriage had been one who preferred the freedom and variety of irregular unions, and Eric had forbidden her to continue this friendship. At the same time he broke with all the friends of his bachelor days, for they did not, to his mind, fit into the scheme of his marriage, since Elisabeth lured his friends away from him. There had been continual discord until Eric broke up the circle which had become too large. He sacrificed willingly, as he put it, his friends for the sake of his marriage.

Eric was accustomed to speak of the difficulty of finding comrades in life and of the still greater difficulty of discovering the friend within the comrade. While he had at first opened his doors to all his acquaintances, slowly his hospitality had brought disillusion and he withdrew completely from society. One only of his former friends, and he indeed the best of them, a comrade of the War days, remained unsacrificed, probably because, living in another town, he had never visited the Zamells; and thus an exchange of letters, founded upon their mutual experiences, had maintained its vigour. This friend, Frederick Zurnieden, lived in comfortable circumstances as a bachelor and official. He had held himself aloof from the life of the Zamells, for he knew well enough how hypersensitive Eric could be. It was one of Zurnieden's

21

best qualities that he could mind his own business and respect the intimate relationships of other people. Consequently he knew little about the Zamells' marriage except that a child had been born of it.

Eric had spoken, not often but in his happiest moods, of this friend. He had delayed the intended reunion not only from fear of the now customary interruption of a friendship, but also in a hope that his marriage might first attain to that fulfilment for which he longed. He was anxious that his friend, when he should visit them, should step into the circle of a perfect union, and that the old friendship should be not merely preserved but deepened by bringing Elisabeth within the bonds that held the two men. By reason of the over-strained intensity with which Eric Zamell regarded all emotional matters, he became what one might call a dreamer, in so far as he strove, in despite of common sense, of practical considerations and even of

deeper intelligence, to win through to his emotional objective with all its exactions.

He had saved up his friend, so to speak, for better days. But already he had waited through five years of disappointment. No longer could he believe that he would reach in Elisabeth the fulfilment of his desires. And so, on one of those hot June evenings, he had written to his friend, pouring out all the anguish of his heart with unreserved frankness, confiding to him all the most intimate movements of his soul. He had ended this confession with a request that his friend should come to him at the earliest possible moment.

Frederick's answer arrived: he would be in Lammsdorf at noon the following day.

Eric's feelings were now in vacillation. No sooner had the letter to his friend been posted than he had regretted it. He was elated by the news that the comrade whom for ten years he had not seen was so soon to be with him again, yet he could not but feel in his heart a tremor of pain and

22

weariness, a fear which spoilt for him the pure joy of the imminent reunion.

At midnight, while the strokes were still vibrating from the cathedral tower, an aeroplane with lighted windows raced over Lammsdorf. Elisabeth laid *Père Goriot* aside and, leaning against Eric's shoulder, gazed at the machine which rushed like a bird in the night from east to west across the valley.

The moment held something of inexpressible poetry; and as Elisabeth leaned against her husband she said to herself that he could never fly an aeroplane. But the man up there in the sky, must he not have been proud I Eric with his downward-searching eyes had something of the worm about him, always peering into the so-called deeps. She was already borrowing his phrases—'so-called deeps' was one of his. But how pleasant life would have been if only he could have been cheerful!

"Has your friend replied?" she asked.

"He arrives at midday to-morrow."

"What does he look like?"

Eric, irritated by these questions, retorted, "Like a human being," wondering what she would ask next.

The next question was ready. "Is he tall?"

"About my height." (Eric was half a head taller than Elisabeth.)

He noticed her reproachful look, which he answered with a grin.

Elisabeth bridled up: "What are you laughing at?" And as Eric did not reply but stared moodily before him she exclaimed:

"I think it's hateful of you not to answer me!"

Then he said nervously rather than roughly:

"Go on with your reading, and please stop asking questions."

## CHAPTER V

THE Rifle Meeting at Lammsdorf lasted from the twenty-seventh to the twenty-ninth of June. On its first afternoon Frederick Zurnieden arrived by the three o'clock train, and Eric met him at the station.

The emotion of the reunion brought tears to Eric's eyes. The two friends set off for home across the hill, carrying the luggage between them, for neither would give it up to the other. It was touching to see how these thirty-eight-year-old men behaved themselves. Covert glances passed between them as each tried to satisfy himself that the other remained the same old friend of other days.

Eric began to talk about his soap factory. To Frederick this seemed silly and trivial; he was glad to observe his friend's unsophisticated demeanour, but saw with a sense of shock the desolation in his face, wherein the sorrow of years was deeply graven.

When they reached the hilltop and the blue expanse of the surrounding countryside became visible, the sounds of music came up to them from the fair in the valley. A mist that seemed denser against the sunshine lay lightly upon the face of the world. The friends paused for a while. Suddenly Eric flung open his arms, as though to seize the sunlight and clasp it to him, exclaiming:

"I want to tell you something, my friend. If ever a man thirsted for purity, for light, it is I. Moreover, I believe I shall one day attain it. First I must find my way past the darkness. I am afraid I must go through with it.... O God! I wish I could be a child again. But my wife doesn't help me, she could if she would, but she lacks the

24

strength of purpose, she doesn't realise the urgency. Our marriage is sheer torture!"

Frederick took his hand and pressed it in silence. Then with the luggage held between them they resumed their journey.

As they came to a little hedge-lined footpath which led to the valley they halted again. Eric picked some leaves and held them in his hands; tears were in his eyes, and the words he spoke brought a lump to Frederick's throat:

“See: just as these leaves are enclosed and hidden by my hands, so would I hide and shelter my heart, my soul, within a secure sanctuary. I want it to be free inwardly and outwardly. I want, with all the strength and passion of my heart, to make life full and beautiful, marvellously full and beautiful.”

Before Frederick could reply Eric burst out in bitter laughter and, seizing the luggage, hurried ahead with long strides towards the valley. The visitor was thoroughly perplexed.

At the house, when Frederick greeted Elisabeth, his manner was cool, almost hostile: she who was accustomed to conquest failed completely to take his heart by storm. In the evening she pleaded a headache, in order to remain away from the men who were on the veranda; she shut herself in her room with door, window and curtains closed, playing the piano. They were serious pieces she played, not popular songs; and yet at times the music would glide as though involuntarily from a Beethoven Sonata into the simple melody of a sentimental folk-song. Despite the raggedness of the playing, a formal coherency gradually emerged. It sounded as though she were striving to transmute her unhappiness into cheerfulness and sociability.

Sometimes she abandoned a melody unfinished, and began another half-way through. She was playing not for the men

25

on the veranda but for herself alone, or for the imagined world of men beyond, for old acquaintances, or for people whom she wished to know.

The two friends outside were drinking and smoking. Their conversation was continually disturbed, for they became silent whenever Elisabeth paused. But actually these interruptions directed the course of talk, especially in Eric's case, for whom, in the mysterious relationship of marriage, the lightest change in the rhythm of the music symbolized vicissitudes in the moods of his wife; and he sought to enlighten his friend with a commentary of sarcasm.

Frederick did his utmost, with indulgent and cheerful remarks, to bridge the terrifying abyss which lay before his eyes; but he was soon forced to realise the futility of his well-intentioned efforts, for in Eric the feelings of love and disillusion, belief, hope and resignation were bewilderingly confused. To some extent his manner of thought and feeling seemed alien and preposterous to Frederick, whose questioning released from Eric an

unrestrained outpouring about the involved course of his married life; at one moment the latter protested openly against his wife, at the next surrendered himself to the overmastering flood of his love for her.

Two or three times Elisabeth stepped to the threshold of the veranda, but, disconcerted by the silence of the two men whenever her playing ceased, she turned away, abashed and wordless. The light from her room blazed for a moment like lightning as she pulled aside the door-curtain and let it fall again, for the veranda was in the half darkness that preceded moonrise. The sound of the hastily-opened door was like the clatter of hidden weapons.

Among unsophisticated people who grow up in closer sympathy with nature than do town-dwellers there is commonly found a belief that all decisive natural events are preceded

26

by unmistakable warnings. And doubtless an acute and untiring observer of human nature could have foreseen the outbreak of passion, the agitations of the soul, and the emotional cataclysm which were about to follow.

So far as Frederick Zurnieden was such an observer, he now set himself to hold his friend back from that perilous road which was leading his marriage to disaster; he proposed therefore that, despite the lateness of the hour, they should resort to the diversions of some night-club: any pretext would have been fair and justified in the face of the approaching catastrophe. But Eric alone knew and felt what was to occur. He wanted to take refuge from the storm that raged across his path, yet, in blindness or bewilderment, he flung himself into it.

Eric rose and, knocking on the door, asked Elisabeth to join them on the veranda. He hoped she would refuse; he wanted to keep his friend entirely to himself. But he was conscious of the tension which Elisabeth, sitting there alone, must have been experiencing. She came in, sat down, and asked him to fetch her a wrap. As he departed, unwillingly enough, upon this errand he heard her first words, a question:

“Are you really his friend?”

Mortal enmity against her blazed up in Eric’s heart. His knees trembled as he climbed the stairs to fetch the wrap. He wanted to run, to return to the veranda quickly enough to prevent her asking such disturbing, biting questions. But his legs seemed to be lamed. It was senseless, he told himself, to oppose her power for mischief. He opened the wardrobe door,



seized a green shawl, rent it from top to bottom and threw it back into the wardrobe. Then he snatched at a black shawl and carried it to the veranda. His hands shook as he tried to lay it around Elisabeth's shoulders; then suddenly, with a gesture of unconquerable aversion, he pressed it into a ball and dropped it into her lap. For a moment their

27

eyes met. But the way she said "Thank you" with a friendly smile robbed him completely of his self-control.

Frederick Zurnieden could scarcely understand what had happened. Eric had no sooner seated himself than the storm broke with unrestrained violence. One was at a loss to tell what it was all about. Frederick did not know who had spoken the first word, but he endeavoured to mediate between the conflicting passions and to explain, turning from one to the other, that it was all a misunderstanding. In vain. The pair stormed at one another. Revolt which had been unnaturally suppressed now broke out uncontrollably with the raging of sick and suffering hearts: they had loved one another. They still loved. They couldn't go on loving. They only repelled one another.

Frederick tried to silence them. He took Eric's arm to quieten him. Elisabeth faced him and said in a hard, cutting tone:

"Has he not turned away from me? Has he guarded and sustained my heart when it was full of unrest and uncertainty? Have I for a single hour been able to feel myself sheltered by his side? I have been forsaken and isolated since the first day of our marriage. Never has he been able to understand my soul!"

Eric tried to shake himself free from Frederick as he shouted at Elisabeth:

"You, you've never wanted me to understand!"

Frederick tried once more to intervene:

"Please," he said, "it's all a misunderstanding."

Eric's agitation was increasing. He trembled, his utterance almost failed him from excitement. His words came in confusion, they were scarcely to be understood, though he repeated them two or three times:

"No, there's no longer any misunderstanding. We do understand one another. Just see how her eyes are blazing!"

28

I know what she thinks, feel what she feels: contempt, nothing but contempt. She wants to be about in the world. A motor-ride is worth more to her than my most sacred feeling. She thinks she can patch a wounded soul with a new hat. I can do that too. I know how that is. I have felt how tedious, how absurdly tedious confessions of love can be—that is, when the soul has been sent to the devil, flung overboard like unwanted ballast. Where is your soul, where, where? What has become of it? For what street, what place that you can point to, have you bartered it? On what gaudy lantern have you hung it? For what young fool have you gambled it away? For what love-intrigue have you throttled it? Ah, caught by the lure of the world! Melancholy thought, that everything should be as it is, abandoned. But to each man in the world there remains this comforting feeling: see, thus I am, thus I have become within myself. And everything moves, hovers and flows in this perplexingly superficial interdependence. It's all a sham! I'm well aware of it. Before I knew you, I was like that myself. But then my heart was changed. Yours didn't change. Yours remains what it has been. It couldn't change. It had no notion of the things that were holy to me. It had given itself up to the world. I'm bound to laugh over the sermon that I'm preaching, against all reason and understanding, yes, against all right, all duty. I'm bound to laugh. But you ... you ... you.... I'll only say this one thing. Just this one thing, so that you shall be able to remember it for ever: now, now you have nothing more to give me, now your heart is closed to my demands. Only leave me in peace; you have nothing more to give me. It is you that have willed it so, not I. I have tried to keep myself from speaking of it. I say nothing more, but you won't understand my silence. Indeed, my words would be nothing to you. Become yourself, yes, become what you really are! Be yourself and nothing

29

else! Be honest, be sincere! Take that advice as the legacy of my love. Seize hold of it, take it with you! Your way is not mine, nor mine yours. We are sundered. The separation is inevitable. I beg you once more, by my suffering I implore you, not to mutilate your heart—so that the suffering and the torture may have a purpose and a meaning. Guard it with all the force of your sense and thought. Hold it fast, hold it with a grip of steel. Let no man touch your heart who isn't worthy of it. The pettiest are worthy of it now—the half-souls, the three-quarter-souls, who, taking advantage of your strength, your suffering, drive you to the devil. Ah yes, you are suffering

too, I know it. Forgive me! Don't throw away your heart from need or carelessness, from despair or love. But give it away! Throw it away whole, not partially, not to several, to many or to all, but to one, one only! That's what I beg of you. If only I could make you feel how I implore you at this moment!"

He had finished and sank exhausted into a chair. He had said all there was to say. He could no longer speak. An emptiness was within him and he closed his eyes.

Elisabeth too was silent. Something threatening, something terrifying—who could define it?—was apparent in her face. It did not occur to her to answer. What could she retort? It was all as in a dream. Her thoughts eluded her, she was waiting for something outside her to happen, she just waited. Frederick was on the point of speaking, yet he doubted suddenly whether it were any good to speak.

Eric jumped up and stumbled through the door into the house. Elisabeth would have followed him but Frederick held her back. He tried to calm her, he begged her to sit down for a while. And then he told her of the revealing words in which Eric had expressed his love for her, had expressed the torture and disillusionment of his soul. He told her all, he placed himself as a mediator between these two

30

beings who wounded each other from very love. Elisabeth was straining to listen, but not to what he was saying. Once she jumped up with a cry as she heard a noise upstairs as though a chair had been overturned. But Frederick quietened her again; he said it would be a good thing for Eric to work off his temper. As she became calmer, she began to listen to his eager explanation of what was the matter with her husband.

Eric came down again a few minutes later. Frederick and Elisabeth were shocked by his appearance; they guessed, even before he could tell them, that he had taken poison. Elisabeth went for the doctor, and while she was still away Eric died in Frederick's arms. His last words were: "I die unhappy. But I can't go on living—that feeling came over me on the landing. I want you to look after Elisabeth and the child. Elisabeth has proved the stronger of us. It was my last attempt—I've failed miserably."

31

## CHAPTER VI

ELISABETH had regained her composure. The doctor could do nothing more than pronounce life extinct. The lines of Eric's face displayed the horror of one who had failed to find peace in life.

The next morning Elisabeth gave way to weeping and said that Eric ought not to have treated her so. Frederick Zurnieden was deeply affected, and with evident grief followed the coffin of his friend to its burial a few days later. As he stood by the open grave, with half of Lammsdorf around him, listening to the clergyman's oration, his eyes strayed beyond the cemetery to the pathway which he and Eric had trodden together but a few days before. He recognized the spot where his friend, standing with outstretched arms, had poured out his longing in words. With difficulty he kept back his tears.

After the coffin had been taken away Elisabeth remained upstairs with her child; and Frederick, returning from the cemetery, decided to go up to her. As he climbed the stairs he saw a man on the landing, brushing his trousers as though in preparation for a long journey. Frederick stood aside to make way for the stranger, who drew himself up, and then vanished, melted away, without leaving any visible trace. Frederick explained this apparition as being a phantom of his mind, overstrained by long watching beside the corpse. None the less he repeated to himself a phrase which, though having little meaning, yet described precisely his impression of the apparition: "he was brushing his trousers as though he were getting ready for a long journey."

The night before his departure he awoke with wildly beating heart from a dream which, even in the moment of

waking, he could not recall. The street lamps were shining on the ceiling, and the window-frame was clearly outlined in shadow. He raised himself up in bed. His heart beat more calmly when he recognized where he was, and he lay down to sleep again. At that moment he seemed to hear a noise as though the front-door were being opened and closed again. And then footsteps sounded in the street, firmly, confidently, unhurriedly moving away. He would have hastened to the window to convince himself of what

he had heard, but his weariness, or else a momentary desire to conquer his own curiosity, prevented him.

He fell asleep once more and dreamed that he was accompanying his friend Eric Zamell to the station. As they passed opposite to the main entrance of the soap factory they heard the night express already whistling in the valley. Thereupon Eric seized the luggage and hurried ahead so quickly that Frederick was unable to keep pace with him. He called after him but Eric did not hear, did not look back. Suddenly dream and actuality mingled: he knew that Eric was dead and buried. He stood still and asked himself why he should run after a stranger. Let him run! Let him go away into the world! What concern was it of his?

Aroused once more by the thumping of his heart he lay wide awake in bed. House and street were still. He heard the whistle of an engine. Listening intently in the hush of the night he distinguished the faint sound of a train pulling up in Lammsdorf station and, a little later, drawing away. He heard the train gliding through the night downwards to the valley and the wheels rolling along the metals which seemed to stretch as clearly before his eyes as on that day of his arrival when he and Eric had walked across the hill.

Frederick could not sleep again. He turned restlessly for half an hour, then rose and dressed. He meant to sit on the balcony, for the night was mild and lovely.

33

As he stepped out to it, there stood Elisabeth, resting against the railings. "I've been waiting for you," she said.

He clasped the hands she stretched out to him.

"Do you know," she said, "I want to sell the factory. I want to travel. I must get away from here. In our happy days I often talked with Eric about travelling. We wanted to be on the sea, under the stars. He was romantic, yes, he was always like a child when he spoke about plans of travel. It is so comic, now, to think that at one time we were really happy. I could weep as I talk of it. Do you suppose that we were always as unhappy as in our last days?"

"Eric was never happy," said Frederick earnestly.

"Oh," Elisabeth interrupted, "if he said that, then he ...". She stopped in the middle of her sentence.

Frederick resumed:

“To travel would be good for you. But would it be advisable to sell the factory? That is a matter about which I am so little able to advise you. But it might meet the case if you were to live somewhere else, to get away from this house, which ...” He paused. “As a matter of fact, does anyone else live here with you?”

“No, but I’d like to get away—that’s true enough,” she answered. And then after a short pause: “Listen: one can still keep hearing it. By now it must be past Bestfeld!”

Frederick experienced an odd feeling as he heard her words. He knew that she was speaking of the night express, the one he had heard entering the station. But now everything was still, no sound of the train was distinguishable. It must have been already far away.

“Yes,” said Elisabeth. “Yes, I should like to be travelling away in it.”

Then unexpectedly she added:

“To think that we have tortured ourselves so much!

34

How sorry I am about it all, how terribly sorry! I could almost long for the old torments back again. Fori was never lonely. And whenever I heard him breathing in the night I forgot his hardness and all the unhappiness. Oh, I wish I could hold back that train which seems to be taking all my unhappiness away with it, taking everything away from me! You know, it’s really very wrong of me, but I shall never want to see Eric’s grave. How dreadful death is!”

The cathedral clock struck two. Elisabeth was weeping, her hand still in Frederick’s. His feeling of dislike for her had disappeared. He understood her weakness and misery. Not only was his sympathy awakened, there was something else, something against which he must be on his guard, a compulsion to pity her, to offer her his love, to caress her, even to do something which, though he might one day repent it, would be till then lovely and desirable. Was it love? Once, years before, in a moment of such emotion he had surrendered himself to another woman. They had kissed and he had sworn to love her, though he could not keep his promise. Later he had realised that there had been in this woman some dominating power which had taken him unawares in those hours of fascination, and in defence he had armed himself with hate and scorn.

Now once again he felt, as he pressed Elisabeth’s hand and begged her to cease weeping, that she too was taking him unawares by just such a

power. Suddenly he knew, watching the dawn brightening in the east, that his feeling of pity was something peculiar to the night and would not survive the light of day. He let her hand go. He crushed within him the emotion that struggled to capture and enslave him. Once more he told himself, as he had done so emphatically at their first meeting, that Elisabeth was a dangerous and dominating woman, that he was no match for her, that she would quickly drain the life out of him.

35

She seemed to know what he was feeling. She straightened herself, wiped her eyes and said:

“If I should ever ask you to come to me, perhaps to help me, would you answer my call?”

“Yes,” he replied with some hesitation. “Yes ... if it were at all possible for me.”

She paused and said “Thank you” with equal hesitation.

In the gardens between the houses the birds were beginning their morning song. And at midday Frederick went away.

36

## PART TWO

37-38



## CHAPTER VII

ABOUT six months before the time of the events just recorded an architect named Richard Tommsen had slipped from some scaffolding, while inspecting a new building in Lübeck, and fallen nearly ten feet to the ground. This accident—unimportant in itself, for such mishaps not rarely leave no damage—had seemed destined completely to derange the man, who in the opinion of his friends had been marked out for great success. From the day of his accident Richard Tommsen utterly neglected all his plans and work. In vain he had consulted one physician after another; no sort of damage could be diagnosed; and the doctors were confronted by an enigma, which was all the more puzzling, since as time passed there was unmistakable evidence of complete psychical confusion. It was as though not only had he lost all capacity for his work but his reason had been affected. His general indifference to life became very marked, and it expressed itself particularly in his total neglect of business. At first, habit had driven him to his office, there to sit inertly for hours in complete idleness before his unfinished plans and sketches. But in the course of time this habit lost its power, and a more harmful manner of passing time took its place—visiting inns, where his peculiar behaviour caused surprise, and the oddity of his conversation, which often took the form of offensive remarks about his colleagues, attracted great attention. The most remarkable thing was, however, that he branded the work for which he had hitherto been responsible as altogether most miserable rubbish. An astounding mixture of critical lucidity and uncritical muddle-headedness led him to the oddest contradictions, of which, however, he seemed quite unaware. With subtle acuteness

he would decry for hours at a time work of his which had won the praise of distinguished experts, letting-off against himself a firework display of brilliant confutation, proving with dazzling words the inadequacy of his vocation, about which there was still an unattainable amount for him to learn; and then, in the next moment, giving expression to views about architecture which, having long since expired in romantic day-dreams, were quite alien to modern opinion. From day to day his ridiculously

sentimental admiration for the buildings of previous centuries grew apace. Those of his friends who had remained true to him after the inevitable collapse of his flourishing practice noted in him indications of a complete loss of memory. Moreover, early in the New Year they observed that he was becoming possessed by a strange restlessness, which was to drive him, three months later, to undertake wonderful journeys.

The fixed idea which had lodged itself in him drew him from town to town, studying old buildings.

In the course of these wanderings he not only spent his time in historic localities, the architectural features of which he could not too much admire, but examined minutely, down to the smallest detail, the style, material, stone and mortar, which had been employed in the construction of famous buildings, making sketches and notes of city gateways.

That he was no longer concerned with purely architectural matters, but, either from enthusiasm or from artistic curiosity, bothered himself for days together with some crooked side street, city gate or church, was some measure of his derangement. But the harmlessness of this romantic obsession became daily more questionable as his foolishness went to extremes. He began to force himself upon local authorities and town clerks with suggestions for the restoration of some ruined town wall; or in all seriousness proposed to build a traffic-control tower in the form of a mediæval fountain

40

from which the water should flow in the direction that the traffic was for the time being to move.

In the smaller towns Richard became notorious for such extraordinary behaviour; and as the townsfolk tried to rebuff this foolishness by laughing at it, the crazy man stole away from most places like a thief in the dead of night, for, strangely enough, he showed himself to be extremely sensitive about any criticism of his behaviour.

After weeks of wandering through southern Germany, Richard was travelling in the hot June days from the west towards Nürnberg and arrived at Rothenburg-on-the-Tauber, a town which was bound to make the strongest impression on him. And it was just at this moment, when he had reached the goal of his romantic pilgrimage, the vision of an almost unspoiled mediæval town, that there befell him a little adventure, if one may call it so, which extinguished at a blow what had so far been his fixed

idea and worked in him a complete transformation. His over-intense interest in old buildings gave way to a complete indifference towards them. The man who had worn himself out with the restless tenacity of his imaginings, who from dawn till darkness had wandered around with pencil and paper in hand, now shut himself up in his bedroom and burned in secret all the drawings he had been at such pains to prepare. Into the night of his spirit a ray of daylight seemed to have descended. It was as though his soul, blind from the time of his accident, was now striving to regain its sight.

It happened about midday on the twenty-fourth of June. Returning from a walk around the town, he had come to the Hospital Tower, had decided to climb it and to enjoy the view over the town.

Up the insecure staircase he clattered and halted at the top before a closed door. He opened it, for no one answered to his knock. He looked in at a miserably furnished room;

41

in the middle of it was a table, whereon he saw a glass, a bible and a pair of shoes. To the left he saw a second door, ajar, leading into a smaller side-room. He moved forward on tiptoe and glanced in. Before his eyes were a bed in utter disorder and a few flowers on the ledge of the little window, beyond which the red roofs of the town, towers, streets and walls, lay placidly beneath the noonday sun.

To reach the window he stepped into the narrow chamber. As he pushed the door open a shocking sight confronted him from the corner of the room. A woman was sitting in an easy chair as though asleep. Her head was bent forward over her breast, the grey hair parted in the middle. But from her mouth trickled down over her breast a thin dark-red stream, which lost itself in the opening of her blouse. The emaciated hands had clutched at the front of the blouse and pulled it open, as though to make a pathway for the blood.

Richard would have collapsed but for an immense effort of self-control. He clasped the bedpost which was nearest to him, and then, pulling himself together, rushed from the attic, fell in the outer room, jumped up again, and stumbled out to the creaking staircase. He fell again, fell down several steps, unaware, as he picked himself up, that he had dropped his stick. He came out at last into the street, where he would have fallen again, had not a passerby come to his help. In a neighbouring house he was given water, and was sufficiently recovered to stagger back to his inn half an hour later.

Two days after this experience Richard left the town and journeyed northwards towards his home, without even leaving the station at Nürnberg where he had to change.

But in the middle of the night, while the train groaned and rattled across the mountains, there came over Richard an unspeakable feeling of unrest, and it grew intenser when the

42

train, having reached the summit of its climb, sped downwards with increasing swiftness through the night. This feeling forced him to leave the train at the third following station and to set foot in Lammsdorf.

At this very hour Eric Zamell died.

43

## CHAPTER VIII

**T**WO years earlier, at a party in the house of some friends, Richard Tommsen had made the acquaintance of a lady who was to exert a lifelong impression upon him. She was the widow of a rich merchant of the neighbourhood and already fifty-six years of age when Richard first saw her. At that time she was staying with friends at Hamburg, where Richard had recently begun to practise and to win his earliest successes. Her Christian name was Angelica; nature had endowed her seductive personality with such charm and cleverness as were still dangerous even at the age she then was. Above everything she knew the secret of remaining young, a quality which appeals to nearly every man.

For twenty years she had lived in harmony with her husband, had become respected for “er good works, and distinguished for her intimate sympathy with the intellectual life of her time. She was moreover a beautiful woman, and it was said that only a few years before her husband’s death her beauty had driven two men to despair and suicide. At the inquest of one of these men, when questioned as to her relationship with him, she had replied proudly, “I loved him.” Pressed to explain the meaning of these words, she had answered, “Love is an obligation for life and death.” It was said at that time that her marriage had assumed with the passage of years the character of pure comradeship, and that on this account her husband had put up with the peculiar relationship existing between his wife and several of her friends. For even though the truth about Angelica’s affairs with the two dead men was never fully known, yet soon, while her husband was still alive, the whole town was aware of her partiality for a certain young musician named Hecke.

44

The fifty-year-old wife was, in fact, madly enamoured of a man thirty years younger than herself, and she might well have proceeded to the limit of indiscretion had not her lover suddenly cooled and become quite weary of her. It was with difficulty that Angelica was able to live down this rebuff.

As a result of these experiences, so her friends declared, Frau Angelica took to a way of life totally unlike that which she had hitherto been leading. From being an intellectual, benevolent wife who had won all hearts, she

became, especially since her husband's death which occurred soon after, a frivolous and fashionable woman, delighting to play with and disturb the feelings of the men about her.

More and more she abandoned herself to the topsy-turvy spirit—rather the lack of spirit—of the time; and passing the greater part of the year in travel, she had been involved in or, more truthfully, had played with many adventures. Was it an old habit of the years long past, or one which, arising from it, formed anew her character? There was within her something which compelled her to play with men, to treat them with that witty coquetry which promises so much and gives so little, which, with a mixture of elegance and indulgence, snares men into a bondage of the senses. Perhaps it was a craving to be the centre of a circle of adorers, just as she had been during all the years of her married life. Perhaps it was a fear, growing with the years, of being flung aside like a piece of old iron before her desires were dead within her. It may indeed have been this which drove her down the easy path of superficiality. Of a dozen friendships which she had formed in the course of her travels not one proved more than a trifling pastime. As so often happens with ageing women, or with those who from innate coldness kindle adoration rather than love, Angelica had set her cap particularly at young and inexperienced men, whose extravagant

45

devotion she could laugh at and restrain. When one day a young man approached her more intimately and importunately than she desired, she was most deeply offended. Life was for her but a plaything; she liked it to be moderately exciting and provocative to both mind and senses, but it was always to stop short of becoming dangerous. It had to be for her a toy that she could lay aside at will.

At the time when Richard Tommsen had made Angelica's acquaintance he was her opposite in everything. Pursuing his studies with intense zeal, he led a life of almost spartan simplicity. Starting from poverty he had with relentless application climbed to success up the rough road of frugality and need. At thirty-six years of age he was entirely without experience of love, except for a few light flirtations which he could not recall without a smile. He lived wholly in his work and found in it his pleasure, everything indeed that he demanded of life. Himself clever, he scorned mere intelligence as a dead and sterile form of spirituality; and he looked forward with assurance to a better epoch which was to emerge from the break-up of modern

counterfeit culture. He had long accustomed himself to the prospect of an unwedded life, finding in the strong bonds of honest friendship a compensation for the unsatisfied cravings of which sometimes he was none the less acutely aware.

When Richard Tommsen met Angelica at a party his life was to suffer on her account a change which neither his friends nor he himself would have believed possible: he fell in love with a woman of fifty-seven years.

His reserved, self-denying and industrious way of life began to take its revenge upon him. He was ignorant alike of love and of women. He was unaware of what Frau Angelica's earlier life had been and, had he known it, it would have left him unconcerned. He was without an idea of the manner in which she exploited life; while she, her

46

first glance divining his austere and masculine virginity, was deeply moved by the opposition of their natures.

All that took place between these two, so unlike and yet so related by a deeper sympathy, was her doing, not his. She did it with delicacy, indeed with charm and spirituality—those almost vanished qualities of her girlhood and early womanhood. It was as though she acted upon an all-powerful impulse with which there was nothing to compare in her previous intimacy and friendship with men. She felt herself drawn to Richard as by a fate against which she was powerless to defend herself. In virtue of this emotion she was reborn, as it were, and re-endowed with all those exquisite attributes which had lain dormant in her during the years of feverish unrest. An animation, such as she had never before known or dreamed of, gave to her a liveliness which belied her years, and surrounded her artificially recaptured youthfulness with an unbelievable charm. Richard was as enthusiastically in love with her as if he were a youth of twenty.

For the thus enamoured pair the world was robbed of all its misery and gloom. After a short separation Angelica settled in Hamburg, where Richard, exalted by his love, was now to accomplish that architectural work which brought him within a short time to a position of respect and repute.

But not for long was this irresistible and enchanting springtide of love to last. Unceasingly had Richard, young but in the full power of his manhood, importuned the fifty-seven-year-old Angelica to marry him without delay, so that they might be able to give each other all that two mortals can. But to this she ever refused to agree.

At first she had sought to explain her refusal as being the highest proof of her love; but becoming weary of his incessant importunity, she was soon driven to plain speaking, by which Richard was strangely moved and, finally, hurt. No sooner had love like a refining fire purged Angelica of her

47

past life than she began to suffer unspeakably from the fear that she had promised in their mutual passion more than her age could fulfil, and so the first shadow fell across their relationship. From that time onwards the spiritual aspect of their relationship was forced into the background; and Richard's love, once pure and ardent, became a consuming bodily desire, which Angelica, in her anxiety to hold him, sought still further to enflame in whatever way she could. Before she was aware of what was happening the old habits of past years had repossessed her, and it seemed that she meant to sink back into new depths of unrest, while she contemplated with secret joy the torture against which Richard in his innocence could not defend himself.

None the less, towards the end of the first year of their love, Angelica, summoning all the good there was in her, regained the mastery of herself. She determined to make the sacrifice and to leave her lover. One evening, as they were walking the neighbourhood of the city, she opened her heart to him and expressed, at least partially, how she secretly feared and instinctively guarded herself against his desires. The hour lent beauty to her words, but he seemed not to understand her. Then secretly she forsook her house and journeyed away, leaving an appeal to her lover not to follow her. Richard, by this time aware of her past life and carried away by his own passion for her, was seized with jealousy; and seeing in this journey Angelica's relapse into her former restless existence, he followed her the next day, driven on not by love but by the fierce passion which had taken possession of him with ever stronger and more exhausting power.

Together they returned to Hamburg. Weeks of quietude followed. Richard was content in the nearness of his beloved, for, since her flight, he had persuaded himself that he could more easily forego the fulfilment of his desire than sacrifice

48

the happiness of being near her. Unfortunately Angelica attributed Richard's acquiescence, his protestations notwithstanding, to a decline of



his love. That was the one thing she was unable to bear; and this misconception stirred her to exploit every means a woman possesses of binding a man to her. One evening she let him understand that she was ready to surrender everything, even her body, to him.

Now, when she should have held his love fast in the bonds of mind and soul, she staked everything upon the seduction of his senses. Not from love but from fear of losing her lover she had given him her promise, and thereby had surrendered that power with which she might have rekindled his love.

As if to defer for a little longer the tragic consequences of what she was doing, she besought that they might make a little excursion, so that, when the fatal hour should come, they might be away from everyone who knew them, away from all reminders of her vanished happiness.

They took the last train to Lübeck and engaged a room in the first hotel that they encountered. It was long past midnight when they went up to bed. Hesitating hour after hour, Angelica had striven to delay the horror that awaited her, the horror of delivering herself, an aged woman, to the embraces of a young lover, the horror of exposing to him that withered body which cosmetics, clothes and all the trappings of fashion had concealed with a false semblance of youth.

The events of that night had led directly to Richard's derangement. The accident which occurred next morning, when he fell from the scaffolding, was the result of that night of horror, compared with which the death of his beloved would have been far less terrible.

## CHAPTER IX

FOR nearly twelve months Frau Angelica had been living in constant fear that their love would come to such an end; and she had striven with all the resourcefulness of her anxious heart to guard herself against it, to keep it at a distance. Now, since the blow had fallen, her first feeling was one of relief. The unspeakable weight of fear fell from her soul and she seemed able to breathe again.

In the world which she saw around her, where the stupidity of men occupied far too large a place, she had forgotten how to feel guilty about such a thing. What hurt her most deeply was the fact that, during the strain of the past month, her quickened conscience had sometimes begun to disapprove of her own life and of the whole realm of her beliefs. She knew well enough that, if the artificially sustained edifice of her life were not to tumble into ruins, she dared not give quarter to this feeling. For that very reason she clung the more desperately to her wanton view that the folly of men, both as it was intrinsically and as it meant itself to be regarded, formed a really permanent factor in life. The folly of men outweighed all the frivolity of women. Whoever loved her, she would have said, must take her exactly as she was. What she was might please him, not what she might become. The capacity to change oneself, the transformation about which poets liked to dream and babble, was just a matter of upbringing, fitting enough for unfledged children, but having absolutely nothing to do with love.

Fortified by this conviction she had for a while resisted the pressure of Richard's desires, when, with all his impetuous passion, he had made light of that appealing confession to which her heart had moved her. For he, a man without

experience of love, had failed to realise the cold power of intellect which these words had displayed; he had on the contrary been suspicious when what she said displeased him. In the stress of feeling he had been too quick in judging her. But in this way the clash of their strongly differing temperaments had been so long delayed.

The unhappy consequences following from Richard's disillusionment were not for long to be for Angelica the laughing matter which they had been when she had first heard of his derangement. After the accident she had not dared to visit him, and the first news of his disordered mind reached her from a friend. When she learned that his memory was completely gone, she hastened to persuade herself that an escape not only from him but from her own unhappy memories was already open to her. The fact that his business was ruined meant nothing to her, for she was rich and would be able to provide whatever money might be necessary for his support. She was quite ready, as the prospect of Richard's recovery diminished, to resume the light and irresponsible life of previous years. She returned to the existence of an over-indulged and flattered woman who acknowledged no responsibility to love or life. It seemed indeed that she had summoned up, during her brief spell of love, all that was good in her soul, so that for evermore she might crush it into subjection.

Heeding only the shams of frivolity and fashion which had already broken one man—honest, strong, noble of mind and spirit though he was—she idled away her days in the planning of fresh travels. Richard and the barely finished year of love seemed already to be forgotten. Then one morning, while she was at a travel agency, she met a friend of Richard who was there on a like errand, and learned from him of the tragi-comic derangement and all the folly of her former lover.

The kindly and beautiful impulses in Angelica's heart

51

had always been strangely mixed with the hateful. Hers was no unyielding nature, but one weak and pliant, at all times responsive to environment and convention, to strange influences and evil habits. She took on the character of her surroundings. She was of the stuff which could inspire one man to write imperishable verses, while moving another man to coarse jocularity. The friend who at the tourist agency had told her of Richard's sad condition knew far more of life than the poor fool who, loitering about the romantic alley-ways and corners of southern Germany, beguiled himself with cheerful self-deception. He had readily grasped the nature of the tie between Richard and Angelica, and pierced to the deeper meaning of their relationship. It was some satisfaction to him to speak plainly to the youthfully-dressed woman of nearly sixty. The fate of their common friend demanded that the full facts should be put with unyielding bluntness. Never

before had Angelica been talked to in such a way; every word was like an arrow that lodged in her heart. Not with ponderous moralizing, but with relentless point and logic, he crushed her vain and ridiculous effort to vindicate herself. His biting words left upon her the most painful impression. She felt defenceless before this man who bid her a courteous but, it seemed to her, an icily cold good-day. She could no longer dare to make the contemplated journey. Her legs had scarcely the strength to carry her back to her house.

Arriving at home, she was overcome by a fit of bitter remorse which, growing more intense as the day passed, gave her the second of the only sleepless nights she had ever known. The next day she lay in a fever, haunted in half-sleep by unspeakable dreams.

She saw her former lover, broken and friendless, crying out upon her curse after curse, while the whips of flagellants drove him through the streets of a mediæval town. She saw

52

him knocking at the door of house after house and calling upon the people to cast their baubles, trinkets, clothes and adornments to the flames. From every door and gateway the townsfolk poured, hurrying to the market-place where men in long red frocks and cowls like death's-heads set up the funeral pyre. From the towers the bells rang out stormily, and across the sky blazed a wheel of whirling fire, cleaving through the clouds with crashing thunder and hurling lightning on every side. A tongue of fire smote down upon the heaped-up pyre and set it aflame, while the people, shrieking, praying and singing, embraced and kissed one another. Suddenly Angelica found herself among the crowd, standing before her lover. They embraced with passionate abandon. The flames of the pyre rose high above the towers and roofs, and set in a blaze the houses of the market-place and streets which led from the Rathaus to the town walls. The whole town was consumed, while the townsfolk with shrieks and moans cried out, "Justice is done!"

For three days Angelica lay in this fever. As she awoke on the morning of the fourth day a turn for the better was apparent. Remorse, memory, desire, penitence and pious resolutions now tortured her, weakened as she was, into a state of complete exhaustion. Seventeen hours of unbroken sleep followed, from which she awoke refreshed but utterly changed.

About noon she left her house, provided with a little money, and journeyed to Lübeck, where, at the hotel of her sojourn with Richard, she exchanged her fashionable clothes for the simple garments of her maid. Late in the afternoon, leaving her belongings in the hotel, she wandered through the streets, and begging at the houses of a suburb, was driven from every door. Walking all night about the town, she exhausted herself with prayers to her lover, and in the morning, entering St. Mary's as though she were a beggar,

53

wept so heartrendingly before the pictures of the Dance of Death that at last the sacristan-in-charge ordered her to leave the church. She sat down and sobbed, when a well-dressed lady spoke to her, while people visiting the church gathered around. She strove to restrain her tears, and when she succeeded, the well-dressed lady was still standing before her. Angelica longed to pour out her heart to this woman, but, forcing herself from this final futility, she hurried from the church and wandered through the town, following the ways where months before she and Richard had walked together. Her feet turned once more back to the hotel, but the porter would not let her enter. She had almost reached the point of collapse, yet she pulled herself together and hurried, no longer begging but as though moved by repentance, towards the cathedral, where she sank upon the stone steps before the closed doors. There, sheltered from the scorching rays of the midday sun, she tried to draw out a letter which she had hidden in her bosom—she had written it to Richard before leaving for Lübeck. She pulled at her blouse in a fever of anxiety which suddenly came upon her, but she was too weak to undo the buttons. A darkness settled down upon her senses. Again and again she called Richard's name. Her head fell forward in a faint against which she still strove to fight. But she could fight it no longer. She lost consciousness, and her last awareness was of a taste of blood upon her tongue. An hour later she was found huddled upon the steps. A thin stream of blood, that trickled from her mouth, had run down into the opening of her blouse, at which her hands had clutched fiercely.

54

## CHAPTER X

THERE was no town that could compare with Lammsdorf during the carnival. Flags decked the streets, flower-garlands stretched from house to house, young and old went about in festive clothes, and the business quarter either closed down before noon or did not open at all. The holiday folk swarmed through the town. The joy of life expressed itself in song and dance. Even a stranger was drawn into the round of jollity, so that in a moment he ceased to be a stranger.

It was shortly after midnight on the twenty-seventh of June, the first day of the fair; and at the fair-ground down by the river the last lights were just being extinguished when the express from Nürnberg drew into Lammsdorf station.

Richard Tommsen, who got out of the train, knew nothing of Lammsdorf, even its name he had barely heard. He wandered aimlessly beneath the tall trees that lined the road from the station to the town until he came to the timber-market. At the Swan he engaged a small first-floor room looking on the street. He exchanged a few perfunctory words with the landlord, and as soon as his luggage had been taken up to his room set out for a walk round the town.

Even at this late hour the streets were still lively. Cheerful and frolicsome, here and there in singing groups, the people were streaming homewards from the fair-ground. Following one of these groups Richard passed through the town and came to the suburb and street wherein the Zamells' house stood. By now the crowd was rapidly dispersing; and when he reached the house where Eric Zamell had just died and from which the doctor, too late to be of help, had departed

55

but a few minutes before, he was the last remaining of all the throng that had been moving in that direction.

There was no light, save that on the first floor of this house, bright enough to be visible from a distance. It attracted him, fascinated him. A memory stirred within him: one night during the War, passing through Ghent, he had been drawn to a light that shone from the basement of a house. He had stood for a few minutes before the closed windows, when

from across the street another man, attracted by the same light, joined him. This was a young infantryman with glasses who, searching for the house of some friends, began to whistle, to tap upon the window and at last to call for the door to be opened. After a while the window curtains were drawn aside and the head of an old woman appeared at the window. She said in Flemish: "You must be quiet, sir, we've someone dead in the house." This memory, recalled after a lapse of years, suddenly confronted Richard as he halted before the Zamell's' house. It made him betake himself, more quickly than he had come, back to his inn.

The next day all Lammsdorf was talking of Eric Zamell's death; Richard listened many times to the name and the gossip. In the afternoon he wandered down to the fairground. Suddenly he recalled the lighted window before which he had stood in the night and which had stirred his memory of the long-ago night in Ghent. He asked a stout Lammsdorfer who this dead Herr Zamell might be, where he had lived, why he had taken his life, and so on. He was answered with geniality and curiosity, the outstanding qualities of the genuine Lammsdorf townsfolk, and learned more or less everything that the town knew about the Zamells.

Now, however, the Lammsdorfer began to question Richard. He had expressed himself freely about Eric's suicide, which he held to have been justified, and so on, and he put to Richard the question, whether he indeed believed in God

56

and thought the so-called soul passed to heaven. Richard did not reply. What then happened to be his business in Lammsdorf?—the townsman asked, as they moved into a tent to indulge in beer and Lammsdorf sausage. Richard gave a confused answer, for he himself did not know. But in this way he was compelled by the stranger to collect his thoughts for the first time in months and to force them into an orderly channel—a thing which, left to himself, he always avoided doing. After his first replies the Lammsdorfer no longer took Richard seriously, but began to talk in a comic strain. He could not believe that Richard was a complete stranger to the place, and he began to have a suspicion which had its origin in the Lammsdorf gossip about the Zamells' married life. He took Richard to be one of Elisabeth's lovers—the whole town was whispering the scandal—who now proposed, the husband and rival being out of the way, to renew relations with the wife. From this suspicion on the part of a presumably

honest townsman in a tent on the fair-ground there came about a strangely ludicrous conversation. In the hope of being able to unmask this supposed lover of Frau Zamell the townsman recounted a thousand details and imagined facts of her life and of her husband's. He winked, patted Richard's shoulder from time to time, and introduced each piece of scandal with such a phrase as "Now would you believe it?" or "This will really surprise you" or even "Just imagine yourself as Frau Zamell's lover." This sort of gossip—stupid and laughable as it was, and little as the townsman knew what he was talking about—none the less made the strongest impression upon Richard. The Zamells captured his interest completely. He began to feel himself a dweller in their house, with such vividness, with such terrible intensity did he picture to himself all those scenes between the husband and wife about which the townsman claimed to know, and which indeed had to some extent the ring of

57

actuality. The conversation became ever more grotesque and bewildering, for the Lammsdorfer at last succeeded in getting what he wanted: Richard confessed that he was Elisabeth's lover. He declared that he would have to attend the burial of his rival in two days' time in order to beg, before Eric was finally committed to the earth, forgiveness for the wrong he had done him.

With a joy which is peculiar to self-torturing people he finally began to heap upon himself the bitterest reproaches and to describe adultery as the greatest evil of society. "Indeed," he cried, "the lightest infidelity deserves severer punishment than stealing or receiving. It is murder, cruel and revolting murder!" Richard's imagination, which his experience at Rothenburg had deflected from what had been till then its fixed idea, had now seized upon something fresh. With all the passion and intensity of which his nature was capable he forced his mind, long unaccustomed to disciplined thinking, to snatch at the threads of his life which lay tangled and confused within reach.

Already the lanterns of the fair-ground, the booths and roundabouts, were lit. Richard could no longer bear the blunt witticisms of the townsman and of the drinking companions who had gathered around. He wished them good night and set off for his inn, absorbed in the new life with which his imagination had now invested him. While, sunk in thought, he was crossing the Bestfeld bridge there came over him a growing feeling of melancholy,



caused by the mental alertness which unmasked completely the unreality of the life into which he was meaning to merge himself and of the dreams which he was already pursuing. He knew that he was Richard Tommsen, the lover not of Frau Zamell but of Frau Angelica who was fifty-nine and dead. As he thought about himself he began to seek for the purpose of his sojourn in Lammsdorf. What he had done almost

58

unwittingly when, by a sheer whim hitherto unexplored, he had quitted the train at Lammsdorf, now seemed purposeless, rash and unaccountable. He determined to follow his original intention of returning home to the north, to seek out Frau Angelica or her grave and to resume work seriously. Busied with such thoughts he mistook the road; and when he became suddenly aware of his mistake, he recognized that he must again be in that suburb in which he had wandered during the past night.

Here, he told himself, must surely be the Zamells' dwelling. His curiosity was aroused to find once more the house before which he had yesterday been standing, the house in which a solitary light had reminded him of that night in Ghent when a corpse had lain in the only room from which a candle shone. He inquired of a passer-by and learned that the house was in the next street. Into this street he made his way and recognized the house. It stood gloomy and unlit beneath the frowning night, amid the smell of lime trees which grew on both sides of the street. A feeling of oppression and anxiety came over Richard. He fought against it, just as one is ready to defend oneself at the first glance of an unfriendly stranger.

Then once more, as in the previous night, he hurried away faster than he had come.

59

## CHAPTER XI

THE third and last day of the Rifle Meeting had arrived. The sun, shining with undiminished intensity, was already high above the housetops when Richard awoke and dressed himself. He had passed a restless night. In vain his mind had striven to resist the impressions left by the experiences of the previous day and to allow the details of his life to arrange themselves into a pattern of common sense, coherency and reason. A consciousness of fear which would not let him sleep had steadily grown within him, and a brilliant moon had passed across his windows as though to rob him of his last hope of slumber.

But towards three o'clock he had at last dozed off. In the trees beside the canal which ran through the timber-market the birds were already beginning their early morning song. When he awoke he was mentally inert and bodily exhausted. He spent the morning in his room, gazing down at the bustle of the street. It was early noon when he noticed that the riflemen were assembling in the market, ready to march in formation to the fair-ground. Led by a band and followed by a large crowd, they moved off. But all these scenes, gay and amusing as they were, could not drive away the thoughts that turned obstinately in his mind: what was he doing here in Lammsdorf? What had to he do with Herr or Frau Zamell? What was it—no longer Angelica or her death—that moved him so strongly that his work was now more remote than ever? Yet this something was none the less an urgent force within him, a will to create and to imagine. What was it? What was he? What had he done? What was he to do?

With thoughts that wandered in ever-widening circles

60

he ate the lunch which, at his request, had been served in his room. Then he set himself once more to watch the movements of the street which, in the magic of his brooding, took on forms of wonderful unreality.

When a married couple stepped out from the café opposite, arm-in-arm and laughing, it seemed to be Herr and Frau Zamell whom he saw. He imagined himself following them round the corner just at the moment when Elisabeth was asking her husband to open her sunshade for her. He saw himself slip between them as they stepped apart for him, and as soon as he

had passed they flung their arms around each other as if the momentary separation had been unbearable for them. He saw Frau Angelica drive across the timber-market in her old-fashioned carriage and wave to his window with a blood-spattered handkerchief. He saw her footman with a bottle of benzine stepping from the chemist's at the corner. He saw himself clambering upon the scaffolding which had been erected at the left side of the market, saw himself fall to the ground and be lifted into Frau Angelica's carriage where the maid placed his head upon her lap to wipe away the dark stains from his mind, and he heard her call to the coachman: "Drive to the Zamell soap factory! It's in Lammsdorf. The place must have a meaning!" Scenes from his actual life became inextricably confused with what he was imagining.

Towards four in the afternoon an agony of unrest drove him out of doors. He was determined to seek diversion, for which—he thought—the fair offered the readiest opportunity. It was there that he now took part in a scene, probably a joke on the part of a mercenary showman, which was to increase the confusion of his mind and finally to drive him to the most extraordinary delusions about himself.

Upon a tent before which a crowd was standing Richard saw a notice: "Ben Massel, who tells your future for three-pence." He slackened his pace and stood still. In a moment

61

he was surrounded by a group of young girls who in the general high spirits of the fair were poking fun at everyone near them. Suddenly he became the target of their jokes. He could not quite make out what they were saying about him but he plainly heard one remark: "I'll wager he's more in love than all of us put together!" A burst of laughter and cries which he did not understand broke out around him. One voice, louder than the rest, was calling: "Ask Ben Massel, ask him!" And from the closely pressing crowd a young girl stepped forward and sprang to the steps of the booth. On the top stair she turned round and laughed at Richard amid the merriment of her friends. He tried in vain to break away. Then a man, the fortune-teller of the fair, came out from his tent and mounted the raised platform in front of it. The girl pointed at Richard, the man looked at him and closed his eyes. The crowd waited breathlessly for what would happen next. With eyes still closed the fortune-teller stepped down from the platform and passing through the throng which made way for him came to where Richard stood.

Bowing low, the man touched the ground with his right hand and then stood erect. "Schabeu," he said, "Schabeu, I greet you." The girls would have broken out in unrestrained laughter but the fortune-teller's glance silenced them. "Fly from the Schabeu!" he cried in a voice that spread terror, "fly!" The next moment Richard was standing alone. Ben Massel reascended the steps with unbelievable dignity, turned round and making another deep obeisance vanished within the tent.

After this adventure Richard wandered back towards his inn. His soul, passing from a state of trance-like resignation to one of wild imagining, was in a twilight of dejection. But the events of yesterday and that dark unfathomable bond with the Zamells had only partially obscured his mind; he had seemed, on the contrary, better able to explore the confused mental picture which he had formed of himself.

62

Now, in addition, there had been this experience before the booth of the fortune-teller where he had been called a word which sounded somehow shameful to him and which his mind seized on as a clue in his quest for self-understanding.

"I am a Schabeu!" The words were still running through his head as he made his way back to the inn. "At last, at last they've said it to me. A Schabeu! 'Fly, fly from the Schabeu I' I heard it distinctly. So I'm a Schabeu! But what is a Schabeu? What sort of word is it? I've never heard it before. What does it mean? What ought it to describe? Only one thing is certain: since I am a Schabeu, a Schabeu is what I am. And what am I? For one thing, I'm on my way home, I have to get back to Lübeck and Hamburg. Then he who journeys home is a Schabeu. Agreed, a Schabeu is a man who has to go home. That's what I'm trying to do. But no sooner had I made up my mind to do so than I got off the train at Lammsdorf. It follows from that, secondly, that a Schabeu is a man who breaks his journey on the way home, a man therefore who is prevented from going home. But why prevented? The reasons ... the reasons aren't clear to me. So, thirdly, a Schabeu is a man who, on his way home, is unaccountably hindered. I can imagine, too, why I was hindered: the fat townsman told me yesterday. It's the story of my being concerned with Frau Zamell. For, however well I may know that I've never had anything to do with this lady, yet I still don't know whether she perhaps has, or had, something to do with me. I have never seen her, and yet a stranger assumes that I stand in a certain

relationship towards her. I assume that he's deceiving himself. Thus the two assumptions stand face to face. Why don't I say I know I've nothing to do with her? How is it then that on the very first night, barely an hour after my arrival, I find myself before her house? And again yesterday? And why does that experience at Ghent repeat itself before her lighted window? The fact

63

that I didn't learn till the next day of a corpse lying behind the window of her house doesn't destroy the likeness between this case and that of ten years ago. One might say, Schabeu is a man who lives in repetitions. It follows that a definite character can be recognized in the repetitions of a man's life. Consequently, a Schabeu is a character. Since I'm a Schabeu I'm a character. That is good, for character is always good. Being a bad character is still better than being a man without character. There's something occurs to me... ah, now it's becoming clear to me why he said 'fly, fly'—a Schabeu is a man who runs after corpses, one whom corpses attract. They attract him to themselves. He runs to them as a moth to the light. He is indeed attracted to the light, to the light that burns beside the dead. I should like to know whether Frau Zamell was watching by the dead man. It interests me. It must indeed affect me closely, if I am her lover. I'm not her lover, but it's quite possible that I shall be. Just once perhaps. It must happen just as suddenly, just as unexpectedly as with Angelica, on the first evening, after four hours of talking and a little wine. How wonderful it was! Alas, that everything should come to such an end! I know that she is dead. She has told me—across all the distance dividing us she called to me: 'I am dying, your Angelica is thinking of you!'"

With such thoughts Richard reached the inn. That night he ate nothing but shut himself in his room. There in the twilight he sat beside the open window.

From the café opposite came the sounds of music. On the first floor people were dancing to some negro tune, the rage of the year, a thing of blatant sentimentality: it was the truest symbol of the times. Across the timber-market fell the ruddy light of a single arc-lamp, revealing the gables of a house perhaps two hundred years old. A few pale stars were twinkling in the sky. The air was hot and dry, full of dust and smoke. A vehicle or two and people afoot moved

64

by; noise and stillness alternated. The moon, that ancient lantern, already waning, looked as though it had been nibbled by mice. Richard's glance ranged upwards. The moon seemed to become a window, a window on a first floor. It was the Zamells' house. Richard's eyes were fixed spellbound upon the sky, and the moonlight drew his soul with its magic as it draws the flood-tides of the ocean. His soul was drawn out of him and flew from his body to share the life of the vast universe. Inert and dead, his body remained by the open window. The moonlight fell across his blanched face and threw upon his closed eyelids the dark shadow of his strongly bulging forehead.

Across the way, on the first floor of the café, while there was a pause between the dances, a young girl stepped to the window, opened it and gazed aimlessly out into the street. Then she saw Richard's white face at the first-floor window of the Swan opposite. His head lay back against the cushions of the arm-chair. She saw his half-opened mouth and the deep shadows where his eyes receded beneath his brow. She thought that she was looking at a corpse and flung the window to with such force that a pane fell out. The sound of breaking glass, as the pane crashed down upon the pavement, woke Richard from his sleep.

His body was limp, as though exhausted by heavy physical work or long wandering. He had been in the Zamells' house. He had seen a man watching by a coffin around which the high candles were burning. The face of the dead was distorted as by a fearful agony. The man, who sat upon a cane chair beside the coffin, fought against his weariness, leaning his head upon his right hand. The room was bare of furniture; against the walls stood immense wreaths, upon one of which was a card with the words "From the workmen," upon another, "From the staff of Eric Zamell's soap factory."

## CHAPTER XII

THE next morning Richard slept so heavily that the maid, wishing to enter with his coffee, knocked in vain upon the door. At midday the landlord himself tried to rouse the sleeping man but gave up the attempt when, listening through the keyhole, he heard the sound of regular breathing.

It was already past six in the afternoon when the street, at this hour peaceful, was disturbed by the distant roll of drums, followed by the plaintive music of Chopin's *Marche funèbre*. Even as far away as the low-lying parts of the town one must have heard the band that led the funeral procession of Eric Zamell.

It was at this hour that Richard Tommsen awoke. His quick ear detected the distant strains; he sat up in bed and hurried to the window. He knew at once what was happening: it was the funeral of Eric Zamell, whom he had seen laid out in his coffin with all the joylessness of disappointment upon his face.

"There is peace only in reaching the goal," he whispered. "He never reached his goal—I saw that clearly. Desires played about his mouth which can speak no longer. Desires were on his tongue which now is silent. Alas, desires are desires, and they can die only when they are fulfilled or conquered."

The bells of the cathedral began to peal, blending with the now fainter tones of the funeral march. The procession must have reached the cemetery. The bells rang out loudly from the slender tower. It seemed as if the sound wanted to linger in the streets; but caught up by the wind, it was carried with a dull echo against the hills to the west of the

town. This echo gave to the Lammsdorf bells a unique impressiveness, a peculiar tone which resounded with extraordinary power.

In all haste Richard Tommsen began to dress. Anxiety urged him on; he wanted to hurry to the cemetery. He believed that it was necessary for him to be there when Eric Zamell was lowered into the grave. He felt that he had given someone such a promise, and recalled that he had assured the stout townsman of his wish to be present at the graveside: he did not realise

that what he had said was all nonsense. The funeral strains had completely unnerved him. As though robbed of muscular control he struggled to put on his collar and tie, and only with difficulty could he get into his coat. The threatening clangour of the bells severed in twain, one part fettered, the other free. He sank into the chair by the window. A flood of infinite weariness broke over him, and he strove to find shelter against it in the visible features of the world about him. But he could no longer distinguish between what was inside or outside. What he saw became confused before his eyes, intermingling and melting into a bluish cloud. Suddenly he ceased to see at all and in a moment the crushing weight of oppression had fallen away.

The unfettered part of him, by a division of his personality, was entering the Zamells' house. The front door was open—no one had closed it after the corpse had been carried out. In the hall lay flowers and leaves, fallen from the wreaths—no one had cleared them away. Beyond the hall was the room where Eric had been lying, and to the right, through a folding door, was the living-room: a grand piano stood in the corner and a glass door communicated with the veranda. The clock beside the stove had stopped at half-past one. On the table some papers were lying. They bore Eric's handwriting:

67

“June 22. I despair of reaching fulfilment—I know that Elisabeth can never satisfy me. How terrible! For I still seek fulfilment in her. I write these words without realising their deepest meaning. It is an experience which I have undergone, but I will not let it poison my blood. Therein is my hope, in spite of all that I have experienced. I shrink from everything that could excite us. I know that the first moment when my mind faces the facts will be decisive. In the meeting of thought and feeling—as they do meet—lies the possibility of my existence. To-day intelligence stands face to face with hope. Let us leave them well alone. But emotion, or the action of passionate excitement, dare not become greater than all subconscious feeling, because, by a contingency at present non-existent, they might join forces and clash with experience. That is how the balance would obviously be struck: the assets of emotion would be diminishingly small when balanced against the liabilities of subconscious experience, and the action of passionate excitement might in a moment become a monstrous force of compulsion. It would drive me before it, but whither?”



“June 23. Every deed, every action, every resolution makes us free. But this introspection has another value: it allows me, mentally, to see things clearly. The clearness with which I see Elisabeth is horrible. I see her with unbelievable distinctness. There is a mathematical precision in every movement of her hand. There is so much in her that seems to me inorganic—so much in her which, I feel, need not have been as it is. My well-meaning but very egocentric heart rebelled, though that was madness. I recognize clearly that the things about Elisabeth which are alien to me are ordained by a higher power: they are so strongly dependent upon the world, so incredibly bound up with fate, that I must acknowledge them to be as inevitable as my own love for her. For the first time in my life I

68

concede to the things which cause me pain and sorrow that full equal right to existence which, hitherto in my life with Elisabeth, I have conceded only to my opposing feelings and judgements. I approve them, and so damn myself.”

It seemed to be a diary written on scraps of paper. Someone had already been reading it, for the chair had been pushed back from the table. A pencil lay beside the papers; a half-filled glass of water and cigarettes were within reach. The carpet of the room was dark-blue with gold-coloured designs—a crazy, haphazard pattern. The white-enamelled doors contrasted too strongly with the blue and “killed” the gold in the carpet. None the less the effect of the room was pleasing, intimate, almost beautiful. The light from the windows was softened by the wild vine that grew over the veranda. The hall was still light, for the staircase window was open to the west. Right and left of the landing were pictures, woodcuts in the manner of the old masters, displaying feeling rather than originality. The cries of a child came from the top floor. Footsteps sounded from the hall. A man came up the stairs; it was he who had watched beside the coffin, his head resting with weariness upon his right hand. He was now dressed in mourning clothes, a little too tight for him and probably borrowed. He halted on the landing. The staircase was too narrow, architecturally too cramped; one had to step aside to allow another person to pass.

The landlord of the Swan knocked on Richard’s door. He banged with both fists against the panels. He was disturbed about this visitor who gave no sign of life the whole day through. Richard roused himself and tried to

recollect where he was. When his mind had cleared a little he dragged himself wearily to the door and opened it.

The landlord was apologetic when he saw Richard's distracted features. It was now after seven o'clock, almost

69

night again. Richard did not know that he had been asleep. The landlord thought he must be ill and brought brandy; then he pressed him to come downstairs and eat in the public room where there would be other people about him. Almost involuntarily Richard did as he was bidden.

He had been sitting in the bar for a while when some musicians with their instruments entered the room—they were the men who had played at Eric Zamell's funeral. Taking up their instruments they began to play a lively waltz which sounded loud and oppressive beneath the low ceiling. Music was their trade—the dead did not concern them. Groups of men, attracted by the music, crowded into the room, and beer was given to the players. Such was life, and it was well that it was so.

Richard left Lammsdorf by the night express.

70

## PART THREE

71-72

## CHAPTER XIII

ERIC ZAMELL'S death had put fear into Elisabeth's soul, although she had faced it with composure. Such was her nervous tension that she became a prey to a terror of loneliness, especially in the evenings and at night. The presence of her little son, who slept in the bed that had been his father's, could protect her but partially from this dread, and the maid was ordered to sleep in the next room. But Elisabeth's terror could not even thus be exorcised, and a light burned in her bedroom from dark to dawn.

When in the autumn and with the approach of winter the nights had lengthened, Elisabeth took to sleeping in the day and reading through the hours of darkness. She read much, but often was obliged to break off in the middle of a story if it were about death, even if the hero or heroine were ill, or if there were an account of some supernatural event or happening of which no ready explanation could be given. The gossip of Lammsdorf alleged that, in spite of mourning for her husband, she entertained frequently, filling her own house with guests or spending her time in the houses of her friends. There was some truth in this gossip. Nobody understood that the terror of being alone was driving her into the company of others. Even in her own circles she was misunderstood. The men thought her frivolous, a merry widow who wanted to be amused; and either they approached her on this footing or else were indignant with her. Elisabeth could not decide which sort of man was the more distasteful to her, the sort who pressed attentions on her or the sort who was outraged by her behaviour. She was soon to find out that the former when repulsed became the latter. She realised too that only wealth and respect for

73

her dead husband saved her from being cold-shouldered by society. But without the company of her fellow-beings she could not live. And so it came about that before the shortest day of winter had arrived she had learned to be in fact something of a merry widow. She accepted compliments with eyes that conquered, promised and provoked. Many a head was turned by her.

In the new year Elisabeth moved into a flat, the ground floor of No. 17 Ringstrasse. Her landlord was a young married man, one of her adorers,

who lived upon the second floor of the same block, and she visited his flat almost daily. At the end of February the young man and his wife gave a carnival party. Frau Zamell was there, and remained among the boisterous guests until the masks were taken off. After she had left everybody understood why the compulsory wearing of a mask had been so strongly insisted on.

The Zamell soap factory prospered. Eric's death had helped rather than hurt it. The manager had placed on the market a few novelties which Eric had never favoured, and at the same time had carried out definite improvements in the plant. Elisabeth, now the proprietress, gave her manager a free hand and an interest in the business. Upon his advice she invested her surplus money in houses and land, bought an extensive pasturage in the parish of Bestfeld and, later on, arable land around Lammsdorf. The green house by the Bestfeld bridge passed into her possession as well as a house in the Langenstrasse, No. 24, just opposite the shop of Weitner, the hairdresser.

Elisabeth's fear of being alone was becoming somewhat less. As the days lengthened she sometimes visited the town even in the twilight, on some errand or other. After the masked ball there had been a mild scandal, and her relations with the married couple on the second floor had become less cordial. That was the fault of the jealous wife. But it

74

seemed to affect Elisabeth little if at all. She was being diverted by a flirtation with one of the factory staff. Since Christmas there had been a seventeen-year-old apprentice in the works-office who had developed a boyish passion for Elisabeth. Shortly after the carnival celebrations the manager had sent him to No. 17 Ringstrasse with a message about business. Elisabeth was still in the middle of her toilet, and, moved by bravado or whim, had the youth shown up to her bedroom. The apprentice, confused and blushing, stammered out his message, to which Elisabeth paid no attention. She took a delight in the young man's bewilderment and requested him to stay to breakfast with her. A fortnight later the manager came to her to advise the dismissal of this apprentice who had been behaving with complete irresponsibility; his negligence had already been the cause of several mishaps. Elisabeth curtly refused the old man's advice, explaining, to his surprise, that she was quite willing to make good the

damage from her own funds, and that she would not hear a word of dismissing the young man.

The latter now became her daily guest. He was moderately well educated and not stupid, but his love and adoration for Elisabeth provoked him to day-dreaming about life and himself; he seemed in this way to resemble Eric Zamell. One day, while the youth was talking of himself, the likeness struck Elisabeth so forcibly that she became frightened. She determined to take him firmly in hand. She read much with him and made him write descriptions of what she thought were the best situations in novels and stories. The boy was filled with all sorts of maxims and opinions for which, drawn from the experience of mature men, he was quite unready. These fragments of wisdom penetrated like foreign bodies into his youth and freshness, but he adored her so much that he willingly let himself be poisoned. Thus she attached to herself someone to dance attendance on her; he had to

75

accompany her when she went to parties, recite poetry to her on their lonely walks, and be ready with a maxim for every mood of an idolized woman.

She was a dangerous woman, as Frederick Zurnieden had told himself. On the first of April the apprentice came to live in her house, and thereafter he was “my dear” to her. He was allowed to call her “Frau Elisa.”

76

## CHAPTER XIV

**I**T was the fourth of April. A refreshing wind blew through the streets and squares. About four in the afternoon Elisabeth went into the town. In the Langenstrasse she met a man whose eyes for a second or two blazed into hers.

This man was Richard Tommsen, who for some time past had been staying again in Lammsdorf. His eyes had lost all their weariness, indeed they looked austere and hard. He walked with buoyancy; the fatigue and exhaustion of the past year had fallen from him. He appeared actually better, stronger and manlier. Only his clothes seemed quite the reverse, they looked old-fashioned, shabby and uncared-for.

The two people, who did not know each other and yet, through Richard's experience in the previous year, were tied by a mysterious bond, looked searchingly at one another for a few moments before passing. Both, then, were busied with thought. Elisabeth had a pleasant sensation that someone was looking at her. Brief as his glance had been, it seemed to have grasped her in its scrutiny. She knew that she was beautiful; many a man had told her so, and her own eyes bore their witness. But what was there in a hurried passing in the street? Such a thing occurred daily. It was pleasant for her to be looked at, and she knew that she dressed too carefully for any fault to be found on that account. She knew too that the sensation of being admired braced her bodily and provoked her charm in response. During the recent months men had fostered her joy in life. She had become young again, as she had been before her marriage to Eric Zamell. There were, however, impudent glances which

77

were unpleasant to her and made her feel uncomfortable. She could not bear impertinence.

Three days later Elisabeth once again came face to face with Richard Tommsen. His eyes were more penetrating, they forced their way into her. His glance made her uncomfortable; she could not withstand it and yet it did not repel her. Her own glance took refuge in the sky, following the clouds which the gale chased over the town; and so she hurried past him. There was nothing extraordinary that she could distinguish in this man,

neither his clothes, his carriage nor his face seemed to divide him from his fellows. And yet there was something about him that marked him out from the run of men, but she knew not what it might be.

Later in the evening of that day, while the apprentice was reading to her, she could not escape from the thought of that afternoon's occurrence. She tried to picture the stranger to herself. That was how he had looked—she mused—upright carriage, powerful, loose-limbed, slenderly built, with his head in proportion; a serious face, almost severe, taciturn and introspective; indeed, in every way a contrast to the boy who was reading aloud with youthful solemnity, who had experienced nothing and could not make distinctions between height and depth, outside and inside, significance and insignificance.

Elisabeth requested the boy to stop reading and to go to bed. She was feeling, for the first time in all those months, the need of being alone once more.



## CHAPTER XV

WILLIAM—such was the name of Elisabeth's protégé—took it ill that he should be dismissed at a time when, for him, the real business of the evening had just begun. Accustomed to her care and tenderness, he was no longer the modest youth he had been when their friendship had sprung up. His true nature, previously beautified or concealed by his love-sickness, revealed itself more and more. He was really an insignificant and vain coxcomb, a pampered hobbledohoy, though Elisabeth's view of him was quite different. He was sharing a bedroom with the five-year-old son, an arrangement which he had at first regarded as a sign of favour, though he had quickly felt it an imposition to be shut up with a child.

To-night he avenged himself for his dismissal, which he thought intolerable, by stripping the blankets from the sleeping boy and by pulling his ear until he awoke crying. He behaved before the child in an astonishing way and when Elisabeth came to find out what was the matter, he gave her to understand that it was indeed no pleasure to him to be obliged to share a room with her son. Elisabeth calmed the child and apologised to William for his being disturbed.

"But why," he asked, "must the spare bedroom remain unused?"

She replied that the idea of "both her children" being together was very attractive to her. William turned his back upon her.

In the night a terrifying storm arose, with downpouring rain and short but severe periods of lightning. The noise roused Elisabeth and she lay awake for an hour. She was nervous and unable to sleep again. She tried in vain to read;

79

her mind refused to concentrate and her eyes passed from line to line until she realised that the effort was useless, and laid the book aside. To her dead husband she had scarcely given a thought, but now suddenly his image rose before her. She could not get away from it, she seemed to be surrounded by his personality, and the old oppression, which she had always felt in his presence, took hold of her.

She rose, flung a dressing-gown across her shoulders and wandered about the room. But the remembered image became more and more vivid.

She tried to shut it out, to fix her mind upon the present, told herself with desperate insistence that now everything was different, was better.

Yet, as she reached this assurance, the thought was forced upon her, "How could I have borne it for so long? It pursues me still, it weighs like a burden on my soul. I know it now, it was always as at this moment: storm for ever around me." She was back in the past again. Her heart beat wildly. She admitted to herself that she was afraid.

It seemed to her that someone tapped upon the window; but when she told herself that it was the rain beating against the panes, she was not reassured. She switched the landing light on and went to the room where the boys were sleeping. There, without lighting the lamp, she sat upon her son's bed. He was sleeping soundly; she listened to his breathing. William too seemed to be asleep, at least he did not move. She wanted to take her son in her arms, to press him to her. That would have sheltered her from the storm that was raging in her own heart. But the child was sleeping, she must not wake him. It was difficult, with the unrest within her, to sit there calm and motionless. She got up and returned to her room, switching on the ceiling-light. She could not have enough light; she lit the lamps beside her bed and on the writing-table. Yet she could not escape from her fear—not fear of being alone but fear of the past, of the

80

present, above all of life itself. All the years she had lived with Eric Zamell came back to her. The smallest details of that long, crushing struggle with him forced themselves upon her memory.

She burst into tears, she cried out for help. With clasped hands she sank to her knees before the bed and moaned, "Since he was still stronger than I, how could he die? How could he desert me after he had mastered me? He who understood me—did he not say so every day? How could he expose me to these dangers?"

A terrifying crash of thunder broke over Lammsdorf. Elisabeth had risen and staggered to the door. There she fell upon her hands and knees, calling "William, William," and "Eric, Eric, why don't you protect your wife?"

She rose to her feet. The light was still burning on the landing. Once more she went into the boys' room, staggering like a sleep-walker towards where William was lying. But she did not reach him, for, as she felt her way past her son's bed, a tiny hand was stretched out to her, took hold of

her and pulled her down to the bed. Her son pressed himself fiercely to her breast. William was asleep.

The thunderstorm soon raged itself out, but the gale continued and became even wilder towards morning. Elisabeth remained at her child's bedside till dawn. Then, returning to her own room, she switched the lights off and pulled back the window curtains. Grey, dun and colourless the day broke. As she looked down into the street she saw upon the pavement opposite that man Richard Tommsen, struggling against the wind, hatless and coatless, with clenched hands and head thrown back so that his face looked up at the hurrying clouds. Struggling he moved forward, step by step. There came over Elisabeth a desire to go out of doors, to fight with the storm and to drive away the spectres of the night.

81

She dressed herself, but before she was ready to leave the house the storm had abated. In the street people and vehicles were passing as usual—it was quite unlike what she had hoped for. None the less she set off towards the town.

When she had closed the front door behind her, William rose and crept into her room. Never before had Elisabeth gone out so early. He had heard her as she dressed and left the house. His curiosity drove him to the window to discover where she might be going. But he could see too little without opening the window. That he dared not do, he might have been seen. His gaze wandered about the room and found a letter on the writing-table. It was in Elisabeth's handwriting, and he read:

“Dear friend, I have again opened my eyes, swollen with crying, opened them as though after a long sleep. I want to live again, and I think I have a good right to want to live. Do you still call to mind that you once advised me to face life with courage? God knows I have done so, as far as I have been able. But it's so hard to forget. A widow has a heavy load to bear. I should so much like you to pay me a visit. I have arranged all my husband's papers, but a woman can't handle such things as a man can. I confess frankly that I'm not clever enough for many of the papers that he left, even when they seem to refer to me. Perhaps you could give me your help, for you ought to know that I want to settle things, to get rid of them and once more be at peace.”

The letter was unfinished. It slipped from William's hands, as he searched in vain to find to whom it was addressed. An extraordinary pallor

had come over his face. He had immediately connected this letter with his early dismissal on the previous evening; he felt he had made a great discovery. Once more he picked up the letter with the intention of taking it away; but he let it fall again and crept back into his room.

82

His face was distorted with jealousy, which had fallen on him swiftly and overpowered him. His eyes blazed angrily as he looked at Elisabeth's son, lying peacefully with his rosy cheeks against the feather pillow. He meant to tear the bed-clothes off the child, but even as his hands gripped at the sheets, a storm of tears broke from his eyes. He flung himself sobbing upon his bed.

83

## CHAPTER XVI

WILLIAM had inferred quite rightly that his early dismissal had some relation to this letter; but in supposing that Elisabeth had sent him away in order to write it, he was confusing cause and effect. The letter was the result of her being left alone. It had not been her intention to write to Frederick Zurnieden. Only through her recollections of Eric Zamell, which had stirred strangely in her while her thoughts had been busy with the stranger in the street, all the scenes of her husband's death were vividly recalled. She thought, too, of those peculiarly tense moments which she had passed in Frederick's company on the night before his departure; she remembered how he had stepped out to the balcony of her former house and had taken her hand, how she had then had the feeling that this man would be at her mercy if she wished it but that he was inwardly on his guard against her, and how she had asked him whether he would come to her if ever she should ask him to come.

She had been considering whether she should send for Frederick, when her child's cries had broken in upon her thoughts. She had hurried into the boy's room, and then the scene between William and herself had taken place. The former's reference to the spare bedroom had confirmed her resolve to send Frederick an immediate invitation. Back in her own room, she had seated herself at the writing-table, taken pen and paper, and begun to write—only a few words, for the letter was to consist only of these: "Please come and help me." But she had torn the sheet in two and, taking a fresh one, had written the letter which William had found next morning on her table.

She had experienced an odd sensation as she wrote. For instance, when she put down "eyes swollen with crying" she could not but smile at this expression, so too when she wrote about having a good right to want to live again. For indeed she had of late lived well and cheerfully, better and more cheerfully, at any rate, than when Eric was alive. But she had left the words as she had written them. When she had mentioned her husband's papers her thoughts had made a long pause, for there was nothing more painful to her than to go over the various things Eric had left behind. She had come

across the paper upon which he had given an analysis of her, an analysis of so terrible a kind that she became frightened of herself. So she had hidden the papers away, in the darkest corner of a linen cupboard where they had been lying for the past six months.

It was just striking ten when Elisabeth returned home from making a few purchases in the town. She felt the strain of the sleepless night; a leaden weariness oppressed her. She gave but the barest greeting to her child who was playing with the maid in the kitchen, and immediately lay down upon her bed to sleep. But sleep would not come to her. Her eyes wandered restlessly around the room. After an hour she rose again and finished the letter to Frederick Zurnieden. She wrote:

“I play the piano often.”

She wrote it, although it was scarcely true; seldom of late had she played. None the less, as her imagination confronted this man, it was true and no deception; and that was valid for all the untruths of her letter.

“I am enchanted with Bach. And believe me, I can’t stand Greig any longer, though at one time I liked him immensely. I should so much like to play to you soon, yes, very soon.”

85

Now she added her greetings, signed her name beneath, addressed the envelope and stamped it. She stepped up to the bedroom mirror, which gave her a full-length reflection. She examined the fit of her clothes and the set of her hair; neither could have been better. Suddenly she took off her dress, threw it aside and changed it for a brightly-coloured spring costume, which gave a younger and more animated look to her tired features. She put on a light hat, matched by bright-toned gloves. Once more she surveyed herself approvingly in the mirror. Then something occurred to her, a thought, a wish. She stood close to the glass and spoke her wish in undertones. The glass clouded over from her warm breath. Her eyes lit up. Once more she repeated the wish:

“I’d love to meet him in the street at this moment.”

It was the stranger, Richard Tommsen, whom she meant.

Out of the house she went. Clouds raced across the sky. From time to time the sun threw fugitive rays upon the roofs and streets. She intended to post her letter in the pillar-box beside the police-station. On the way she passed two sub-post-offices and hurried by them with averted face. Yet her

eyes were missing nothing, she had observant eyes. Already from far away she recognized the solitary figure which was walking towards her.

To-day her eyes had an especial loveliness. She could give her face an inquiring look which had its effect on any man, a air of solemn curiosity which knew just the moment when eyes should be lowered or should maintain a stare that looked through and abashed the beholder.

When she came to the square where the police-station stood she saw in the distance that stranger to whom she had called as she confronted the mirror. She was frightened. Nevertheless she determined not to avoid this meeting, for she meant to post the letter. With head slightly lowered

86

she walked past the pillar-box beside the police-station. Eric, Zamell had once written of her: "She is bound to look at everybody, some people especially. God in heaven may know whether her heart is blameless in so doing. The fact is beyond doubt that she can do nowadays in all innocence things which formerly, perhaps years ago, sprang from a guilty heart and a seductive intention. The question is, whether the same gesture, the same look, when it recurs later in innocence, be not guilty for all time." That is what Eric Zamell had once written, and it had been read by Elisabeth, who now was hovering across the square. She hovered.

How silly were such considerations compared with the pleasing self-satisfaction, with the elemental feeling, which possessed her and impelled her with ravishing charm towards Richard Tommsen! If Eric Zamell could have seen her, he would most certainly have concluded from her dress, her carriage, the poise of her shoulders, head, arms and hands, that she looked like a poisoned arrow which, shot from the darkness of its hiding-place, now was seen, when closely observed, to be speeding towards Richard Tommsen, to wound him, to poison him, to destroy him.

She moved elegantly but without affectation. There was a charm about her. She controlled her inner self but it could not control her—one could read that in certain of her movements. She was fashionably dressed, that is to say, she felt as did the world in which she lived: she felt up-to-date. The way her head was bent suggested an inner pliancy, a tenderness, a softness, a pensiveness. Her eyes looked frankly at the world to which she did not belong although she felt she belonged to it. Her stylish way of dressing showed that she knew how to make an effect—that was the intention behind every one of her movements. That intention was not necessarily

bad, but woe to the man whom this woman set out to ensnare. He would no longer be the master of his life.

87

The power of passion radiated from her—she knew the way to seduce.

“I have an irresistible impulse,” thought Richard Tommsen, “to strike this woman, perhaps to strike her only in order to do good to her. I have a feeling, just now as she approaches me, of hate. I will not avoid her, and if she inclines her head still more, as a suggestion that I am to get out of her way, still I won’t do it. I’ll let it happen; my answer to her command to get out of her way is that I won’t obey. I refuse obedience, since I have not sworn myself to it. Doubtless she thinks that I too must obey—from experience, from custom, because everybody does it. She is accustomed to being obeyed by all the world. But I won’t do it, no, not I!”

So the two came together. It was no violent collision, just the lightest touch, which already began with “Pardon,” that word which does not allow the slight pressure on an arm to become pressure at all. That suddenly, as Elisabeth looked up, her vision seemed for a second or two suffused with red, was, to the other, to be explained by her excited condition. She answered his “Pardon” with “Don’t mention it,” but she spoke it with such lingering tenderness, such expressiveness, that the little phrase seemed to say, “I ask you to pardon me, unknown Sir.”

Richard Tommsen gazed at Elisabeth. He had involuntarily stood still after their collision. Nor did Elisabeth move. He excused himself, lifting his hat with an exaggerated flourish. It was a sufficient, an over-sufficient, courtesy towards an unknown lady. She looked up at him with an unforgettable glance. Unexpressed desire lurked in it, a glance of sheer intensity, almost timorous yet tremendously alive.

But Richard went on his way after he had apologized; he had begun to move even before he had put on his hat again.

88

She too moved on. After proceeding for about twenty paces, Richard, however, paused. He felt an urgent desire to follow her. He saw that she had moved down the street towards the post-box and was standing before the window of a hosiery store, but she walked into the shop without turning to look at him. At that moment he noticed a letter lying beside a tree near where he had bumped against her. He picked it up, thinking she must have



lost it. He glanced at the address and, moving across to the police-station, dropped the letter into the pillar-box.

In the shop Elisabeth made a few purchases, not because she needed them but for no reason except to interrupt her walk. She discovered the loss of her letter as soon as she was out in the street again and, returning to the shop, assured herself that she had not left it there. Then she hurried homewards, searching the road along which she had come.

By the time she reached home she was no longer sure whether she had not indeed posted the letter. She could not clearly remember, and as the matter was no longer of interest to her she forgot it. Not till the evening did it return to her memory.

William was to read to her. He did not refuse but read so badly, so inattentively, that Elisabeth gazed at him with surprise. Beneath her glance he blushed hotly and stood up.

“What’s the matter?” she asked.

“I can’t read any more.”

“Why not?” she asked in astonishment.

“When is your friend coming here?” he cried out.

Elisabeth did not understand what the boy meant. She thought of the stranger with whom she had collided, but that did not explain his question.

“My boy, I don’t understand your question,” she said.

He replied excitedly: “You’ve written a letter!”

“Ah,” Elisabeth laughed, “did you find it?”

89

She reddened beneath the gaze of his blazing eyes. She had a feeling of guilt towards him but was, at the same time, irritated. He reminded her so much of Eric Zamell, the way he stood there and tried to coerce her, to hedge her about. But her reply rang with a tone of superiority. For the first time she spoke sharply to him:

“There are things which are no concern of yours. I must ask you to mind your own business.”

The boy was silent. She added, after a pause: “You have posted the letter, I hope.”

As she spoke she glanced down at her hands and did not notice the astonishment on William’s face, for she inferred that, since he knew the contents of the letter, he must have opened it.

“Or have you not posted it?” she asked, looking up at him.

“Certainly,” he said. He had realised that his remark about the letter had betrayed him and was not to be explained if he had only posted it.

“Where did you find it?” she now inquired.

“Here on the parlour table,” he lied. “I sealed it and dropped it into the post-box.”

“Indeed ... now read to me. Herr Zurnieden was a friend of my husband. He is an excellent man. I value him highly. You will like him too, and he you.”

Obediently William resumed reading, but Elisabeth was not listening. She was wondering whether the stranger, who had bumped against her in the street, might have found the letter. Had he delivered it here? But she had not written on the envelope the name and address of the sender. Why hadn't the maid said anything about it? She must have taken the letter at the door; to-morrow she should be questioned about it. But had the stranger opened the letter? Ah, probably, in order to find out the sender's address.

90

But why did he not simply post it, just as he found it? Ah, he wanted to find out her name! It was all clear to her.

Elisabeth busied herself with these questions which so little fitted the facts, while William read aloud to her some verses from the *Twilight of Mankind*. He now read better than at first. The conversation with Elisabeth had quickened hope within him that the letter might never reach the man to whom it was addressed.

91

## CHAPTER XVII

AFTER Richard had posted the letter he retraced his steps and halted before the hosiery shop. But he did not wait for Elisabeth; it was only for a moment that he stood before the shop window. His idea in following her was ridiculous, and he decided he would follow her no longer.

"There's no purpose in it," he murmured. "It can't have any purpose so far as my affairs are concerned." Suddenly there raged within him the old but undiminished powers which in recent years had thrown his life into confusion. They cast a shadow upon his thoughts and feelings, inducing a lassitude which would not allow him to think or feel. He knew it well enough. Almost with self-pity he owned to it.

He walked away with uncertain steps towards the marketplace. There he intended to sit beside the first-floor window of a wine-bar, a position from which he could watch, unseen, all the movements of the market-place. He believed that he might thus recapture the serenity which he had lost while he had been standing before the hosiery shop.

He was disturbed by his own condition. He explained it to himself as a foolhardy complication which, as he knew from experience, was at any price to be avoided; and he repeated to himself, as he approached the market-place, "Somehow or other I must avoid the worst."

Yet it seemed to him absolutely laughable that he should be talking of "the worst" without having any notion of what he meant. It was an awareness within him which did not spring in any accountable way from feeling, imagination and intellect, or from anything he had experienced or apprehended. It was, rather, something of which he was aware

92

in his very blood, a thickening of the blood which began to affect him bodily, showing itself in his languid movements, his sluggish step and melancholy eyes.

Reaching the market-place he told himself, as he pictured himself smoking and drinking for hour after hour in the bar, that he was done-for, absolutely done-for. Yet he did not really wish to hurry past the place and to return to his lodging where he could have laid himself down for peaceful and refreshing sleep. He turned towards the bar, walking with lowered face

as Elisabeth had done; entering, he bought a packet of cigarettes and settled himself in a vacant seat by the upstairs window.

He called for a glass of wine. The uncomfortable thought assailed him that the lady, against whom he had bumped, might cross the market-square at her husband's side. The thought raged within him as he stuck a cigarette between his lips and took his glass of wine from the waitress; he thought, or felt, "What if the husband happens to take her arm? Better to see it soon, yes, soon, than not to see it at all, if it has to be!"

The wine was good. Its fire quickened his blood and enveloped his spirit in the starry heaven of timelessness. From his mind there faded the sense of all those disagreeable things that mattered; the world was shut off from the essential "I," which thereby grew vaster and vaster.

He finished the first glass, and thought:

"Now I'm in Lammsdorf again. Ridiculous, that this hole should attract me. It was pleasant in Lübeck too. I had much more money than to-day. But money, what does it matter? If I'm careful I can live quite well for the next three months. Three months, if I'm careful. But I daren't make a fool of myself. No adventures—I must be wary. I'll start work again, find work here in Lammsdorf. I'll work with enthusiasm for bigger things and higher aims.

93

I know it's only with enthusiasm that I can work at all. My present condition is still a twilight. I don't yet know what is going to happen to me. But I know that the moment, the first and best moment of realisation, the decisive moment, is coming. I am saving myself up; I feel as though I were fully prepared. My time is at hand. As to that woman, I've often met her. Somehow or other I'm sorry for her. There's something pitiful about her. There's something in her face that makes me want to weep.... How the clouds hurry! It's April!"

He finished the second glass.

"Why," he continued, "didn't she want to get out of my way? If she had known how I hate everything to do with women! I wonder whether she could see that. How right you were, Van Zanten, when you said that Europe was a monkey-house. The town hall yonder, how beautiful it is! Sixteenth century or even earlier. But I've done with all that sort of thing, finished with it once and for all. I am my old self again. I wish all the people who used to see me with Angelica could see me now as I sit here. How they

talked about me when I was in Hamburg, calling me ‘the lost son’! Ah, if they had only known, if they had had an inkling! I said so to Jensen, he was the only one who knew. And yet he didn’t understand. I noticed it one evening when we were at Travemünde. ‘What sort of name is Zamell?’ he said. ‘Where does it come from? What language? But one thing is certain: you’ve no concern with these people. It’s all imagination. You’d overtaxed your brain—that’s how such dreams usually occur.’ Then when I replied: ‘But I am a Schabeu,’ he couldn’t find anything to say except: ‘That’s nonsense. Schabeu is nonsense.’ I knew better. I had to go back to Lammsdorf. But one thing I won’t do: never will I speak about the Zamells. I’ll never set eyes on their house again.”

94

He finished the third glass.

“I could have stayed in Lübeck,” he continued. “Wismar too was very pleasant. But here in Lammsdorf it’s quite different. I don’t really like the place, everything here awakes a longing, a desire for greater scope and better things. Every house and street, for example, is too narrow, too small. Yet none the less they are just right for me. They stimulate me. Their proportions are bad, but at least they have proportions. When they wanted to redecorate this house, they scraped away the old plaster, and behind it, see, the original stonework of the door and windows lay bare, old placid shapes, wonderfully beautiful. Then they decorated it again in the modern fashion—an unholy stupidity, and yet far less stupid than in the case of new houses. And the Langenstrasse where my lodging is, how will it look in autumn? The idea gives me pleasure. To-day, for instance, might be an autumn day when the blue sky is to be seen through the clouds. Yonder across the market, yes, that’s just how it looks! An incomparable autumn, an autumn that take’s one’s breath away. I want to experience it.”

“Another glass, waitress!”

“Do you see, my friend, that I have entirely changed? Do you still say ‘Tommy’ to me as you used to do? Aye, Tommy Schabeu! Somewhat changed from the Richard of other days who used to build houses. Tommy Schabeu pulls them down. The sun has spots, people say. Hence the hurricanes. Good, very good—an explanation, dear friend Jensen, which you admit. The sun has spots, hence Schabeu, Tommy Schabeu. Exactly similar. That is the inference in every paradox. Motor-cars in a fifteenth-century marketplace. The wind blows from the south-west. We shall have

May days in April. In May there will be June heat. But that is a memory. Let us shut it out. We've nothing to do with it."

95

"Tell me, waitress," Richard said to the girl who was bringing his fifth glass, "do you know the house where the Zamells live? You must know about Eric Zamell who died last year."

"Well, yes, I do know it," replied the girl, "but it's no longer owned by Frau Zamell. She has sold it and moved to another house. That's not so very long ago. After she .... The girl did not finish the sentence. Richard, who a moment before had been sitting quietly and cheerfully at the table before her, was on his feet, pale and agitated. His glance silenced her.

"I don't want to hear about it," he said. "My bill, please." He paid his bill, knocked the glass over, and departed for his lodging—number 24 Langenstrasse, third floor, Frau Krafft's. It was the house just opposite the barber Weitner.

96

## CHAPTER XVIII

THE landlord of the Swan was celebrating his fortieth birthday. Free beer was being served. About ten o'clock in the evening Richard approached this inn where he had stayed during his first visit to Lammsdorf. He walked into the bar; the landlord recognized him and led him to a table at which a man, elderly so far as one could judge, was already seated. The face of this man attracted Richard's attention at once, and he began to observe it intently. It was in no way extraordinary; but it seemed distorted, full of contradiction and contrast which divided it into two opposing portions, the upper and lower halves. The strain of a constant and obstinate struggle was expressed in the protruding muscles of a face which was furrowed by lines of sorrow. Richard had often before seen faces of this sort. The man must have felt himself isolated, he thought, and yet solitude seemed to be his consolation.

A memory of his long past youth suddenly awoke within him. During his early years there had lived in a house opposite that of his parents a man without wife, children or servants. This man was never heard to speak and was never seen except alone. How or why he lived thus was a mystery. And he was called "the Recluse." Where the name came from, who had first used it, Richard no longer knew. But this recollection caused him to apply to his neighbour at the table this same name.

They got into conversation. It was not Richard who began it but the man, who, in spite of a vow never to talk in public resorts, was now talking. A peculiarity of the Recluse, or rather a precaution, was that, as he could never resist alcohol, he no longer carried money with him when he

felt moved to visit an inn. In this way he sought to keep himself from chattering about the secret which he feared to betray under the influence of drink.

But to-day he had entered the Swan already a little drunk. The beer, served free, was too great a temptation and proved his undoing. The conversation which took place between him and Richard was, unfortunately, plainly heard by the people at the neighbouring tables, for he

raised his voice in his excitement. "I like drinking." That was how he began the conversation, looking into Richard's eyes.

Richard made no reply. Yet he was destined soon to drive to his ruin—with cruelty, indeed with unbelievable callousness—the poor devil who sat facing him; not, be it said, with evil intent, for then would all single-mindedness and determination be evil, and that is not so.

"I like drinking," said the Recluse once more.

"Because of sorrow?" Richard asked.

"Yes indeed," was the reply, "a deep sorrow. It's not black but red I see before my eyes."

"Red is the colour of flesh," said Richard.

"You are right, you understand me. That is what I meant," the Recluse whispered. These were the only words he whispered.

"That is better, much better, than if the colour were yellow," said Richard.

"But I am jealous, madly jealous!" the Recluse exclaimed. "And though it hurts me, I can still envy him ... although I wouldn't be in his shoes, not at any price. He is nothing to me. She is everything to me. She is everything, and I can't forget her."

"Adultery?" Richard asked bluntly.

"If you call it so. Good, I call it that too. Drinking is all that's left to me. When I'm in drink she's mine. That's the beautiful thing about it: when I'm drunk I

98

imagine that she belongs more to me than to him. When I'm drunk I can shut them up together without doubting her fidelity. The deeper fidelity belongs to me. I .... The Recluse sprang up and shouted across the tables:

"I, Christian and surname, swear by almighty God that she belongs to me, to me alone, to me and to no other man in the world!"

Richard pulled him back into his seat:

"One can see that you are absolutely right in what you maintain. I for one take your word for it without asking for proof."

"I swear it," the Recluse shouted once more.

"Good," Richard answered. "Even though you've no proof I believe it."

"But I will prove it," the other shouted. "You'll be astonished, you'll be overwhelmed by the logic with which I shall relate it."



“Better not relate it,” Richard interrupted. “Why do you want to distress yourself? The truth is, proof is only possible in mathematics, because there one can predict what must follow. But in life where everything is damnably unpredictable how could you prove, for instance, that you love someone? Why should I believe you? What if I choose to doubt that you love, simply because you make such a shocking noise about it? Love demands that one should be quiet about it. Ah, you must indeed be in despair if you can shout.”

“I am in despair, I am indeed. That’s a mere trifle. See how my hands tremble. Everything has gone to the devil. Do you think I’m still asleep? Why should I sleep? I’m going to the dogs, but that’s not the point, though it does seem, after a certain limit, the only sensible thing to do, the best thing to do, the only right solution. Oh, an entirely excellent thing to do, believe me!”

99

“Why are you always looking at your watch?” Richard interrupted. “Is it a souvenir?”

“Ah, devil take it,” the Recluse responded, “everything is a souvenir, each thing, each street. In my watch I carry her portrait. And a flower. She gave me this tie, in the first year. It’s ragged, but you can see that there couldn’t be a prettier tie. She ought to have chosen a stronger material, one guaranteed to last a lifetime, one that would have lasted as long as my love. But there isn’t such a thing. Why did she get married? Why?”

“Can’t you begin your story now?” Richard asked, as though the Recluse had promised to tell it to him.

“I live in solitude. I must live in solitude,” said the man, and drank some more beer. “I should like to show you her portrait and say, ‘See for yourself. What do you say to that? You can see everything.’”

“Indeed?” said Richard.

“I live for myself. Our affair came to an end four years ago. I thought at that time that I was bound to die of sorrow. But I didn’t. It would have been senseless. She would have assumed that it was just illness. I didn’t want that, really I didn’t. Then I learned a way of overcoming my sorrow, the only way to live the sorrow down—intoxication and oblivion. So I managed to get through the first days, forgetting her husband’s triumph. For he did triumph.”

“Go on, go on,” said Richard, for the Recluse had stopped speaking.

“She came to me often in my dreams, but remotely, always remotely, as though she were an elf. God, if she had only come as a human being, it could have been borne! But picture to yourself the way she did come. It was terrible. All the former ties between us are severed. She is unapproachable. It is exactly like the earlier reality. Her

100

husband has a factory. Why shouldn't I tell you? The factory behind the mill.”

“Ah,” Richard exclaimed, “in this very town.”

“Yes,” said the Recluse, “my time of happiness was here in this town, but it lasted only a couple of months. Then the agony began—until I ran away from her. Once she brought me back. Then I bolted a second time, this time for good, beyond recall—I could do nothing else. Her husband even supported me, but that couldn't last long, it was simply intolerable. I loved her. That was why I left her ... but I must show you her portrait.”

“No, no, don't!” Richard cried sharply.

The Recluse laughed and knocked a glass over. “You are afraid of yourself?” The glass rolled from the table and crashed noisily upon the floor. Neither of the men paid any attention to it, but the Recluse gripped Richard's arm and said:

“Have you a good memory? Can you tell me what you were doing a year and seventeen days ago?”

Somewhat taken aback, Richard considered the question before replying: “No, I can't.”

“Now, listen,” cried the Recluse. “I can tell you what I was doing on any day during the past four years without having to think about it very long. In that way I'm like an automaton. Question—immediate reply. Now ask me.”

“Three years ago to-day?” Richard asked with a laugh.

“I had pains in my back. Got up at seven. At ten o'clock I was in front of the museum (in what town doesn't matter) where a few days earlier (four, to be precise) I had seen a lady. There was something about her, the way she moved, wore her hat and cloak ... but I never set eyes on her again.”

Richard laughed. But the Recluse was insistent. “Ask me!” he cried.

101

“All right, four years ago to-day?”

“Oh, then she ran out to me in the middle of the street, because I said I had to go away.”

“On the eighth of September four years ago?”

“It was a terrible day. She had gone to bed before eleven that evening. For the first time since I had been in love with her she had gone to bed before her husband. There had been a time when she stayed up with me till three, yes, till half-past three or even four in the morning. The whole day she’d been upset, wouldn’t give a straight answer to any of my searching questions. I was terribly unhappy!”

“What happened on the twelfth of September?” Richard cried.

“That was one of the most terrible days. I saw them leave the house arm-in-arm, slowly, leaning closely to one another as though they were happy. Then everything seemed to snap within me. She had assured me that scarcely as much as a handshake still took place between them. What I then saw was the true state of affairs. All the rest was moonshine. She was only making use of me. I trembled as I looked. I fell on my knees and prayed God to forgive her for being what she was. I decided to get away from her, so that I might save her from further wrongdoing. For her sake I was willing to take all the sorrow upon myself. Oh, she had sinned against me grievously!”

“Good, good,” Richard exclaimed. “Just one more question and then no more. What happened on the eighteenth of September?”

“That was a hard day,” said the Recluse. “I saw that she was in love. Always, when that happened, she was irritable, extremely nervous, and every word of hers cut like a knife. She was inconsiderate, as people are when they’re jaded. I found it difficult to breathe. I pressed her to go out, and she went. But it was terrible, her way of treating me as though

102

I’d done her an injury. Oh, it was then that I began to despise her more and more!”

Richard interrupted the excited man, “You’ve got to tell me the name of this woman,” he said. “You owe that to me. O God, no man could endure what you’ve had to bear!”

“Nonsense,” the Recluse replied. “Why shouldn’t a man endure it? One can put up with much more than that! I could tell you things that would make your hair stand on end with terror at the thought that such things could be in the world. When the great weariness overpowered me ... you

must understand, one day I was very, very tired, terribly tired. ... I don't know why ... probably it was the poison of this love that daily, almost hourly indeed, divided us ..."

"Ah, you don't want to betray this woman's name to me. However, I can understand that. Don't talk about her, then! Her husband had the soap factory behind the mill, you told me. Then I know her name too. And she lived at that time in the Lindenstrasse, in the house with the big veranda built out behind."

"Yes, that's the house. How have you been mixed up with it? O how beautiful and poisonous everything is! Four weeks ago I visited the people who are living there now."

"I wonder," said Richard, "who told me about Frau Zamell's leaving there."

"Now you've got the name!" the Recluse exclaimed. "But it was terrible—the familiar rooms, although with different carpets, different furniture. But I found one door which hadn't been repainted, and the parquet-floor was still the same. I visited these new people. It was stupid of me, stupid! But I couldn't keep away. As we sat at the table I moved my chair until it stood no longer on the carpet but on

103

the parquet-floor, the floor that still remained from the old days. I let my handkerchief fall, so that I might be able to touch once more with my fingers the familiar thing, the only thing still there which had seen so much of our love."

"What are you saying?" asked Richard. "Do you really mean to say 'our love'? But, man, you were the only one that loved. You told me just now that you yourself were never loved."

"Did I say that?" the Recluse burst out in a noisy laugh. Once more he asked, "Did I say that? Ah, if I said it, I was lying. That was pure humbug on my part. You must understand, I have to humbug myself, I repeat it like a poem learnt by heart ... a poem? What shall I call it? An article? An article of faith? I mean, rather, a confession of faith. But it isn't true. I swear to you, it isn't true, I swear it!"

"Yes," Richard interrupted, for the excited man was beginning to fidget with his hands again. "Yes, when you are drunk, then suddenly Frau Zamell is in love with you. It seems so to you in that state. Then you forget all the

barriers, difficulties and denials. Then you no longer see her husband. Then you believe, poor devil that you are, that you are loved in return.”

“But devil take it, I am loved!” shouted the Recluse. I am as surely loved as ... as ... I can’t think what.”

Richard laughed. “It’s easily understood that you can’t think what. That’s easily understood.”

“Oh, if you want to torment me in this way, you shall see who I am! Probably you think that I’m humbugging you. I’m afraid you suppose that I’m telling you all this just as a piece of swagger, just to put on airs.”

He sprang violently to his feet and shouted loudly across the room:

“I swear that there was nothing more I could ask!

104

Nothing, nothing! She was mine, entirely, all of her—from her soul to the tenderest nerve of her little finger!”

Richard laughed, a terrible laugh, a shattering laugh, so that the people at the neighbouring tables stood up, annoyed by the conversation of the two men. The whole room was listening to it. Some people were on their feet, some pressed around the table where the two sat.

It all seemed to amuse Richard. He laughed still more loudly, as though he were immensely pleased. But the Recluse rolled his eyes in an alarming manner. His hands shook, his whole body seemed out of control. He tried to clutch at the chair, but his hands missed their grip. It was terrible to watch. The people about him tried to take hold of him, reasoned with him, grumbled at him.

Richard wanted to come to the help of his companion. He turned to the others and said, “Can’t you see that the man is drunk? His drunkenness has made him talk wildly. It’s all nonsense. Do you think that I believe a word he’s been saying? That’s the way to treat his babbling. I tell you, this man is absolutely drunk. That and nothing more, as I can testify.”

Some of the people in the room nodded understandingly. There was a murmur of “Yes, yes,” and “That’s what it is.”

At that moment the Recluse threw off the effects of his intoxication. He spread out his hands, lifted up his arms and cried, no longer too loudly, but distinctly and impressively:

“I swear that Elisabeth loved me. And I ... I ... will go to her. I will do that without shame. Let me go. Get out of my way. Elisabeth is holy to me. I know what I have to do for her and ... and ...”

They made way for him. He staggered towards the door, then turned round and faced them. His last word had sunk

105

to a murmur that no one could distinguish. Now, as he straightened himself and turned round, his voice rose once more to distinctness, although he spoke quietly. As he spoke, a laugh, half of joy, half of simplicity, spread across his features, giving his face the look of an old, surly and toothless dog.

“In the name of our love,” he said. “‘Our’ writ large, very, very large.” After these words the old weather-beaten face lit up and beamed with an unbelievable, heart-rending and deeply affecting benevolence, the look of a child trusting in the promises, help and protection of parents devoted to its good, a confidence in others so vast that it annihilates all self-consciousness.

Richard had stood up. His eyes stared fixedly into the face which seemed to seek him out across the tables. Eric Zamell would have fallen on the old man’s neck, he thought; but even as this idea occurred to him he was unable to explain what it meant. There was something about it strange and familiar at the same time.

But the idea provoked and compelled him to follow after the Recluse who had now disappeared through the doorway of the bar.

106

## CHAPTER XIX

**R**ICHARD stepped out into the street. Glancing to right and left he could see nothing of the Recluse, who must already have hurried out of sight. He therefore crossed the timber-market and, choosing one of four streets almost at random, turned into the Burggraben. Stars were shining in the sky above.

“He must have gone this way,” he said to himself, “so I’ll go this way too. I can understand it all so well. How fabulously beautiful Frau Zamell must be, or have been; what a personality she must have! What a mind and what a soul her body must hold! Yes, for her one could fling oneself from the bridge with a cry of ‘Elisabeth’—or else without a word. Just to see her, to think of her and of all those hours of intimacy! Oh, what do you know of the blessedness which this poor wretch has experienced? In order to be stricken by such love, what moments of blessedness must first have prepared the soul for this sorrow! By what kisses must the body have been dissolved, to what heights must the heart have reached to bear for four years, for four long years, the depths of this agonized life! What power this woman must possess that this poor devil could surrender himself with all his thought and faculties, making for himself a thumbscrew, an unrelenting rack, and with undying hope deliver himself up to these instruments of torture! Do you know what undying hope is? Have you a belief that could be compared with this? Have you a notion what the poor wretch achieved when he hurried away, when he forced himself to leave his beloved?”

Richard was running. With head stretched forward and searching eyes he was closely scanning everyone he met.

107

Once or twice he moved to the opposite pavement, hurrying from one side of the street to the other.

The thoroughfares were almost dark. Light still shone from a few shop windows; the moon above gave but a feeble glimmer. Now Richard turned aside, as though following a predetermined route, into the little lane which led to the Bestfeld bridge. There he recognized the figure of the Recluse about a hundred paces ahead, hastening as fast as he himself along the street.

Richard ran as quickly as he could. Just before the bridge he overtook the Recluse and seized his arm. The latter took fright, tried to tear himself free, but Richard held him fast and began to speak:

“Please calm yourself. Don’t look at me so angrily. I’m a human being like yourself. I’ve listened to everything you’ve said. You can believe me that everything you’ve told me has sunk deep into my heart. There is an incredible bond between us, but with this distinction, that you come from one side, I from the other. In all that you have experienced you have been my counterpart. But now, I think, it is time that we came to an understanding.”

“I do understand,” whispered the Recluse. “Leave me alone, please leave me alone. At one time I had an inspiration, but its hope was rudely shattered. Now I must act, now I must act!”

“But what do you mean to do? I beg you to calm yourself, to keep yourself in hand.”

“I have been boundlessly deceived,” exclaimed the Recluse. “As a man I saw in a flash, so clearly that my reason almost gave way, that which, otherwise, I experienced as something divinely right. I was so undoubtingly sure of my sad condition, so immovably sure. Ah, how I broke up my own life! Why did I break it up? Why was I mad? For what had she done? She was blameless, she was

108

pure. She never lied to me. I tell you, she never deceived me, never told me an untruthful word. Only, why was everything so terrible? Why didn’t I keep my faith? Why was I so unjust? What is the divine justice of which I was always prattling, if it can treat us poor mortals in such a way? Yes, at this very moment it keeps running through my head that she was right, but that I was right too. Ah, what does that matter now? I no longer understand it. I am altogether despondent, altogether irresolute. No, no, there is no explanation. I am utterly bewildered. There is nothing left for me now. I doubt and doubt. It’s just as four years ago, one minute ‘Yes,’ the next minute ‘No.’ No man could bear it, it’s hell!”

“Yes,” Richard replied, “that is so, it is indeed. There’s only one way of escape—put an end to the vacillation, flee from sorrow as well as from joy. That is the only way. I know no other.”

“I have tried everything,” the Recluse exclaimed, “have drained the cup to its dregs, drunk the very last drop. In vain! Oh no, don’t look at me like



that! It makes me feel that I can no longer bear to look at this face, this caricature of a face, in the glass, it gives me a taste of unconquerable nausea!’

“I understand you more and more,” Richard answered. “It’s a good thing that you are becoming calmer. Don’t let us remain standing in this lamplight. I should like to explain your misery. We’ve got time, heaps of time. Listen. Your lady—now pay attention, I’m speaking with deliberation and knowledge—your lady is still living in this town. Where is her house? Can’t we go to her?”

“O God, O God,” the Recluse groaned and tried to free himself from the other’s grip. Richard would not let him go. He reasoned with him, importuned him, used every means to persuade him to go to the lady, to this Frau Zamell who was named Elisabeth.

109

“Come,” he cried. “Lead the way, show me the house where she lives.” He pulled the Recluse away from the street lamp, away from the bridge and towards the town, talking all the while.

“See,” he said, “I spoke just now of explaining your misery. I have a theory. It’s my habit to express everything as an equation. I have reduced myself to an equation, which is, in short, that I’m a Schabeu. You can make what you like of that. But now for your equation. You are happy and unhappy at the same time. Your emotions lie between extremes of feeling, between exaltation and despondency. They have been familiar with both limits and yet at neither have they been really at home. The conflict resolved itself by your arriving at one end or the other. I’m sure you must always have talked about simplicity, about being pure and unmistakable. All your struggles show clearly in your face. With you it’s everything or nothing. Poor dreamer! When I call you that you feel you are being pitied. You protest against it and at the same time feel just a little bit flattered. Oh yes, that’s so—you may as well confess it. And at such moments you think more about yourself than about your condition. These are the times when you rise above yourself and become a man supporting a load of sorrow rather than a man who is sorrowful. At such moments you have been great, far greater than you knew; you were a man of destiny—exalted, like a soldier at his post. You must know the words: ‘Do your duty.’ It is the only command the soul can give itself if it would mount upwards. Surely you asked yourself, as I do now, whither you were climbing? Up to the blue sky

above? Oh no! Rather, I think and believe, you were climbing to the heaven of her eyes. That alone would bring you happiness—to climb into her eyes. Your greatest wish was to fall into her eyes, to sink, because your love was ready to be dragged along in captivity. You

110

want movement, that's what you want. It's stupid to suppose that you are above all things placid in your emotions. Obviously she was exactly like yourself. No, I don't know that, I infer it. Emotionally she has craved for fulfilment. Tell me, was her husband the same? Ah no, you certainly shouldn't answer that question. We are making a fuss about a really ludicrous problem—it isn't complex at all but dreadfully simple. It is an equation of which the terms are belief and unbelief in a person. You don't know whether she has wronged you or not. That's always the way. The one was as wrongheaded as the other. They'd both become confused. Very often what she said or did helped you. Then a word of hers offended you, and once more you did not understand why she could have done just this thing, and you felt you had been callously repulsed. There was no peace for you then. You allowed yourself no peace, or only that sort which is an eternal unrest. From everything you heard, saw, experienced, inferred, you convinced yourself that you were right in what you heard, saw and inferred. Everything was right, each judgement, each disagreement was right. And so the strength of your conviction grew. Ah, how hard you were towards her! Don't be offended by what I say. I understand you so well, appreciate so completely your situation, your fate, your misfortune—but not less, your immense good fortune. For you must have felt how happy, how unspeakably happy, she could make you in the midst of all your misfortune. That is absolutely true. Otherwise she too couldn't have borne it. To make someone happy is more blessed than to be happy oneself. And yet were you both more unhappy than happy? Probably you are quite unable to answer that. You don't know, could not know. Besides, whoever talks in that way is talking at random. Love must be compared with love, if one is to be just. And love doesn't concern itself with what is just. Love coupled with justice

111

is a matter of the brain. That's exactly what you too think, I know. I can see that in you. But that which is human is the most essential but not the most human thing in humanity. That is a stupid conception. It arises from the

emptiness which, in the case of the so-called educated classes, is caused by too great, too emphatic a divorce from nature, by too great an estrangement from the laws which determine good and evil without defining them, by being at too great a distance from the limits which determine form. Form is a limit. And we people of the present day are without limits. That is our worst fault, our ever-present need. Some people despair of this formlessness. Thereby they move near to God once more. As the saying is, God draws nigh again. But there is no God. Yet He draws near. You will say, that is a contradiction. But what does that amount to? Love is a force, but have you any more exact knowledge of the love which you feel? Everything is bound up with the world. There is no getting behind facts. We must take things as we find them, both of us. Do you not feel that things are pre-ordained? What do you hold to? What are you doing? Tell me that, I beg.”

The Recluse wept so heartbrokenly that Richard could do nothing but stand silently by. The man’s whole body trembled convulsively; it seemed that it must fall to pieces with the violence of his emotion. He bowed low, straightened himself defiantly, bowed again and twisted himself about as if in the acutest pain. His groans and broken utterance all depicted a convulsion so alarming that Richard looked about for help.

They stood alone in a deserted street. The sickle moon, which had been high in the heavens but a quarter of an hour earlier, had now disappeared, for a bank of cloud, coming from the west, had crept across the sky and hidden it. Only a pale light-green glow remained as the arching clouds, stretching from north to south, moved steadily eastwards

112

in the silent night. At the far end of the street Richard espied a row of lighted windows; they were on the first floor, and a party, perhaps music and dancing, was probably in full swing. It seemed to him that he could hear the rhythm of dance music, but that was possibly imagined—an idea associated with some similar scene.

He could not drag the Recluse beyond the still-illuminated house; besides, he was sure that the man would resist his efforts. He could only leave him to his weeping; it was bound to finish some time. It was useless to speak to, still less to reason with, the unhappy man in his present condition.

The Recluse continued to sob and groan. Among the meaningless words he stammered one alone could now and then be distinguished: Elisabeth. The two men were still standing on the pavement, six or seven feet from the front of the house, when one of the ground-floor windows was opened. A woman leaned out, her white nightgown glimmering palely against the darkness of the room behind her. Richard did not at first hear the sound of the opening window. But the Recluse heard it and, turning his head, stared fixedly; his eyes, seeming to start from their sockets, attracted Richard's attention and directed it to the woman.

Richard recognized her and was frightened. For the woman was none other than she whom he had followed a few days before, who had been haunting his thoughts, whom he had bumped against in the street. And he now gazed at her with startled eyes.

He tried to speak to her but his lips would not form the words. He wanted to call to her for help, for suddenly the Recluse had collapsed and sunk to the ground without seeming to lose control of his body, arms outstretched and hands folded as though he were praying to the woman who, though still standing before the open window, had retreated a step into the darkness of the room.

Richard's eyes were straining to see the woman clearly.

113

He bothered no longer about his companion who, fallen to his knees in an attitude of devotion, was now crying out the name "Elisabeth." He glanced from the woman to the man and then once more at the woman who had retreated still further into the room. She was barely visible, yet he was sure that she was standing there, listening, as she swayed weakly upon her feet, to every sound that came from the street.

Richard moved to a position between the woman and the Recluse, as though to be a mediator. But that was not his intention: he only wanted to explain to himself what was happening. He was nonplussed and uncertain what to do.

Suddenly there was a roaring in his ears: Fate! Fate! A woman listening in the darkness of her bedroom. A man on his knees, broken, praying to her with clasped hands. What was he saying?

"Forgive me, forgive me, Elisabeth!"

It all happened in a moment. The whirlwind roared by Richard's ears and was gone.

There came a cry from the room. No, the Recluse had first jumped to his feet and made off. Then there had been the cry from the room, or both had been at the same moment.

“What can I do? What is there I can do?” Richard asked himself immediately, as the Recluse, in mad flight, turned the first street corner, stumbling, falling, scrambling to his feet again and in a moment disappearing from view. Richard stood rooted to the spot. He wanted to follow the Recluse and hold him back from running away into the night, into the final, the blackest night. But he could not move. His legs seemed powerless while his brain asked question after question: Why here in the street? Why before this window? Why involved with this woman? Who was this woman? What was this woman?

As though he were losing his reason a cry, feeble yet distinct,

114

broke from him into the night. It was a cry and yet a command: “Elisabeth!”

There was no answer. Or was the fact that a light flooded the room to be taken as an answer? An electric bulb glowed from the ceiling. A shadow moved across the curtain. It was hers.

Then the woman stepped to the window, stood upright before it and gazed at him. He shrugged his shoulders and said: “He’s run away, Frau Zamell.” She moved nearer to the window, almost leaned out of it and made some remark which was not clear to him. Then he spoke again: “Dress yourself,” he said. Elisabeth nodded her head as if to say “Yes.”

Richard waited. The light was switched on in the next room. That must have been the sitting-room, he thought. Someone was certainly moving about in there. He wondered whether she were dressing. Would she put on her outdoor clothes? Of course she would, he supposed. But suddenly a doubt crossed his mind. Just as he had once been afraid that he could not avoid seeing her with a man, so now it occurred to him that not she but this very man would come from the house into the street. He gazed in the direction in which the Recluse had just disappeared and, sunk in thought, did not notice that Elisabeth was once more standing at the window and regarding him steadily with a searching look. She was dressed and seemed to be in no hurry.

Richard waited. A movement by Elisabeth first roused him from his reverie. He was standing with his back to her, but his eyes recognized the

movement of her shadow on the pavement. He stared at it fixedly. Now she stood motionless at the window. He knew that she was watching him and he asked himself why she should do so. What might she be thinking of him as she gazed at his back? Why did she hesitate? What was she nervous of?

“It’s a struggle between us,” he said to himself. “Which

115

of us will move first, she or I? It’s got to be she! I will it! I’ll hold myself here, whatever happens. I’ll stand here as though I were rooted. I’ve got to know first that she is moving. The house is entirely silent—so she hasn’t made a fuss or roused anybody, neither a servant nor a man, as I thought she might. So it was she who put the light on in the sitting-room. She’s called Elisabeth. The name runs so familiarly off my tongue that one would think I’d always been used to it.”

He heard footsteps. Were they in the street?

“I must hold on,” he continued. “I must behave as though nobody were going by me. No, the noise came from the house, it wasn’t in the street. I hear voices. So she has roused someone in the house. She could scarcely help doing that.”

Then came the sound of a door being opened and shut. The shadow on the pavement disappeared. Richard looked round. Elisabeth was no longer at the window.

“Now she’s in the sitting-room,” he thought. “I knew it. One of the two windows will be opened. Right again! She’s opening it herself. How casually she pulls back the curtains! She doesn’t hurry herself. But why shouldn’t she take her time about it?”

Elisabeth leaned out of the window and spoke. “We are going to open the door for you,” she said.

“I knew that already,” Richard said to himself, as though aware that something were compelling her.

The electric light was switched on in the hall. Footsteps sounded and the front door was opened. William came out to the steps. “Good evening,” he said with a bow. Richard did not answer but passed immediately into the house. As he climbed the stairs that led to the apartments he heard William saying:

“Frau Zamell hadn’t expected you so soon.”

116

## PART FOUR

117-118

## CHAPTER XX

WILLIAM, William.”

Elisabeth hurried into the boy’s bedroom.

“Please get up. A visitor has arrived.”

“All right, in half a minute,” he answered.

“Do hurry. I want you to be with me.”

“All right, I’m getting up. I’m coming. Where are you?”

“In the sitting-room.”

“I’m coming.”

“Will you answer the door?”

“Yes. Has the bell been ringing?”

“You must have been sleeping heavily. Do hurry.”

“I’m just coming.”

“But don’t make a noise. Don’t wake up the child!”

Elisabeth was standing by the sitting-room table. She could not conceal her agitation, her hands were shaking.

William ought to come. William should be with her. He ought to stand beside her, and clasp her hand, place himself between her and the stranger, to protect her. So ran her thoughts with increasing anxiety as she heard Richard’s footsteps coming up the front steps. The hall door was opened. Now he was in the hall. Now he was approaching the door of the room in which she stood, agitated by a thousand memories and fears. She could scarcely hold herself upright as she stretched out the hand which he clasped firmly without saying a word. His glance seemed to pierce her, so that her own eyes had to avoid him; and she whispered rather than spoke as she invited him to sit down.

At this moment William came into the room. He saw

119

that Elisabeth was seated on the sofa, while Richard was taking a chair opposite to her.

Startled by the expression of her face and alarmed by the silence of these two between whom there was apparently no bond of friendship, William stood in hesitation at the door. His eyes were fixed upon Richard, who paid



him no attention but directed his first words to Elisabeth, words which were meaningless to William.

William supposed that this stranger must be the man to whom Elisabeth had written a few days previously, the man whom she had described as the friend of her dead husband, the man of whom she had said that he was fine and distinguished. He didn't look it, thought William, who, tormented by jealousy, was angered by Richard's words and driven to the wildest imaginings by Elisabeth's evident discomfiture and bewilderment.

"Two things are possible, Frau Zamell," Richard began, "either you accompany me in pursuit of the unfortunate man, try to bring him back and make good the wrong done to him, or, on the other hand, we act as though we had heard nothing and seen nothing. That is for you to decide."

Elisabeth shook her head. She was refusing, but what she was refusing did not seem clear.

Richard continued:

"If I may be permitted to advise you, I should like to propose that you come with me."

For a few seconds Elisabeth directed at him a searching glance and then refused with a shake of the head. She looked round at William, whose bloodless face betrayed his amazement.

Richard rose. Elisabeth, rising too, turned to William and said:

"Please fetch me my hat and a light cloak."

120

And Richard added, "We shall be back again well within an hour."

William hesitated to obey Elisabeth's request. His glance was fixed questioningly upon her eyes.

In the street there was a noise. The fire-engine clattered noisily by. Richard stepped to the window and looked out. William, rushing to Elisabeth, seized her hand with a pressure that hurt, and whispered:

"Don't go. Or let me come with you. I won't leave you alone!"

"Fetch my hat and cloak," Elisabeth returned very quietly.

Richard's voice came from the window. "It's possible that the fire-engine ... I don't think there's a fire anywhere. It's far too late."

He stepped back from the window into the room. Elisabeth pulled her hand away from William, who left the room, his heart full of indescribable aversion to Richard. He stood before the cloakroom, from which he was to fetch the hat and cloak, and sobbed with a burning emotion which he could

not express, which was beyond his strength or understanding. He could hear a voice speaking in the sitting-room, Elisabeth's voice, but could not make out what she was saying. He took her hat and cloak from their hooks, wiped the tears from his eyes and returned to the room. As he entered he heard Elisabeth's laughter, that bewitching, infectious, delicate and tender laughter. She was speaking:

"It was probably my fault. I was thinking so deeply that I didn't pay attention to where I was walking. At all events, you mustn't think that you hurt me. But the way you bumped into me did give me quite a fright."

Then she turned to William with her accustomed expression.

"Help me on with my cloak," she said.

121

William felt her gaiety piercing his heart like a knife. Every word she spoke seemed to mock at his feelings. Her laughter ignored him. He stood in a corner of the room, his presence unneeded, for she had someone else to talk to.

Within him burned a desire to prevent her from going out. He longed for something to happen which should detain her in the house. If only her son would call to her, if only he would tumble out of bed and hurt himself! But nothing of the sort happened. In powerless rage he watched Elisabeth buttoning her cloak, putting on her hat and taking her gloves from her handbag. He looked at the stranger and knew that he, William, was completely out of her thoughts.

He ran out of the room, across the hall and through the kitchen to the little balcony from which an iron staircase led down to a tiny garden.

"William!" He heard Elisabeth calling after him, but paid no heed. He slammed the kitchen door threateningly and stood on the balcony. "William!" he heard her call once more, but the cry only sharpened his pain. He would let her call, let her shout after him. He would force her to follow him. She must not go out. He would do something to detain her—break something, glass or flower-pots. He would smash the iron staircase, or fall down it. Elisabeth should not go out.

He ran down the steps into the garden. He had meant to fall but did not: that only increased his rage, his helpless desperation. He stood in the garden and looked up at the house. The kitchen light was switched on and Elisabeth came out to the balcony; she stood in the shaft of light that came through the open door, and called down to him. "William!" He made no

answer; he would make her come down to him, she was not to go out. If only the steps would give way, if only she would tumble down them and

122

break her leg! "O God," he prayed, "do something to keep her from going out with that fellow!"

Once more she called his name and then stepped carefully down into the garden. He rushed to her, seized her hand and arm. His whole body was trembling.

"Don't go out!" he whispered in passionate agitation. Then, weeping half in anger and half in pain, he let her go and flung himself to the ground.

The fire-engine came back through the town with a great clatter.

Elisabeth spoke. There was a reluctant and unsympathetic note in her voice: "Come, William, do be reasonable." Then, without bothering more about him, she climbed the steep staircase. At the top, silhouetted by the light from the kitchen, she turned round and called:

"So that you may know, let me tell you that I am going out now. We shall be back again within an hour. Look after the house."

As William did not answer, she added impatiently:

"You might at least let me know that you've understood!"

William's voice came from the garden, sounding strange, harsh and desperate: "I understand."

She vanished through the door and went out of the house with Richard. William, hearing the sound of the closing door, stood up and crept back to his room. He did not turn on the light but undressed in the dark and lay down upon his bed. His jealousy, feeding on dark and hateful forebodings, would not let him sleep. He strained to hear every sound. About three o'clock his sharp ear detected, through the two rooms which separated him from the street, the sound of footsteps outside, but they continued past the house. His feeling of powerlessness was thereby made the keener, and he gave way to tears, clenching his fists helplessly. He was in

123

love with Elisabeth, perhaps to-day for the first time with all the strength and ardour of which his nature was capable. He was no longer angry with her. His hate was for Richard. His thoughts of Elisabeth became more tender, more indulgent, and his sole wish was that she might soon return.

Through his emotion glowed that first warm ray of genuine love, anxiety for the well-being of another.

An hour later he heard her come in. She entered his room without switching on the light and, after listening beside her child's bed, came over to him, feeling for his head with her hand, as though to assure herself that he was lying there in his bed. He gripped her hand, kissed it and whispered, "Thank you for being back again."

"Sleep," said Elisabeth, "sleep well." Then, bending over him, she kissed his forehead. She had never done that before. A few minutes later he fell asleep.

## CHAPTER XXI

**I**T was mid-May. Dawn came gloomily, with feeble and deceptive light. The rain still held off and the clouds hung as though empty over the roofs. It was uncertain weather and the streets were full of dust.

Richard awoke at ten. His room shook with the vibration of the heavy lorries which, with the fussy rattle of old age, hurried by towards the station. Those lorries would run till not one stone stood upon another. Clouds of fine dust were loosened from the crumbling mortar of the ridiculous old house-walls before which earlier generations, those worthy forefathers who found comfort rather than inspiration in progress, had stood in admiration.

This fine, barely visible dust was the first thing of which Richard was aware as he awoke. The fine dust of the ruinous age was settling upon his soul.

It was his daily experience to live within a circle of ever-recurring thoughts. He called it the mill of sorrow. All too deeply had Angelica maimed his nature. For him the things of emotion had lost their glamour; and he was one of those men for whom life without this glamour was impossible. He did acknowledge the possibility of resignation, but in his soul still burned the fire for fulfilment. For him there was no insight of the heart, and that of the mind was powerless against the urge of the emotions.

Outside in the street a man was running after the tram, in an effort to reach the station ten minutes before the departure of the morning express. A stick was in his right hand; with his left hand he clutched at the metal upright on the platform of the tram, to which he was trying to jump.

There would be an accident, thought Richard as he

125

watched the man; and jumping out of bed, he looked between the curtains at the overcast day.

The man jumped, missed the platform, stumbled and lost his balance; but in his anxiety he did not lose his grip upon the upright, and was dragged after the quickly moving tram, his head bumping against the cobblestones.

Richard flung open the window. In the street was a tumult of cries. The tram-driver, signalled to stop, applied his brakes—but too late, the man was

dead, his skull battered. The police made their way into the crowd.

Richard stepped back into the room with blanched face. For a few moments he stood still with widely staring eyes; then, sinking to his knees, he lifted his hands in prayer and said in a loud voice, "Lord! God! Father! May eternity receive the soul of this man! Take him to Thyself, Holy God! Amen."

There was a feeling of suffocation in his throat. It stirred him deeply that he had prayed for the soul of this unknown man.

"Gentlemen," he said, rising to his feet with a smile, "it's odd to think that there are such people as myself in the world!"

Through his mind passed a succession of ideas; death, the misery of mortals, life, the horrible wearing-down of another's being, death, sickness, love—and his own sorrow, the sorrow for which he was born. Through it all he felt himself touched by the experience of the Recluse; and a thought pierced his soul like a flash of lightning: Frau Zamell. Elisabeth!

There was a bond between them; whence it came he did not know. Mind, senses, heart and soul, they were all one. And with a feeling of terror he realised that he loved her.

He laughed at himself, at the slightness of the link between them, the link which consisted of her contact with the world

126

in which he lived, which he saw before his eyes. "I have seen," he said to himself, "the death of that man who was trying to jump on a tram, I have shared in that experience. This evening she will read of it in the newspaper. That youth, who lives with her, will read to her the report in the paper. Of what importance is one man since the War in which millions died? What did Frau Zamell do in the War? What were her experiences in it?"

"I must tell her," he continued, "that I prayed. I always raise my hat to a hearse—she ought to know that—I mean, of course, when it's occupied." He laughed. "Tramcars are occupied too. What a stupidly grotesque association of ideas! Is Frau Zamell occupied? Has she friends? Has she a friend who counts before all others? What does friendship mean to a Frau Zamell? A dagger in my breast, a tangible and bodily pain in the soul. No wonder, since mind, soul, heart and body have all become one!" He felt that his prayer had been fully justified by the shortcomings of Frau Zamell.

A dray rattled by and the walls of the room trembled. Richard said to himself that, should Elisabeth ever become his wife, they would never live

in a room that shivered and quaked at the passing of every vehicle. Then he smiled at the presumptuousness of his thoughts—these thoughts which were not marketable goods but more like flotsam. He smiled again as he added: “God bless our shores,” a church-prayer which had fallen out of use sixty years before.

Once more he resumed his place at the window. “Ah, how melancholy the street is,” he thought, “when at night the last tram, the last motor, has disappeared and only a solitary pedestrian remains. How often I have been that one! How often, during the weeks that I’ve been living again in Lammsdorf! Ah, the maddening monotony! Nights, thoughts, feelings, always the same! I am thirty-eight

127

and homeless. Years ago, in the little village, people talked of me as being dead and were astonished when I turned up again safe and sound and full of life. That was a happy day for me, when I realised that I had been mourned for. And the old innkeeper said to me: ‘When you were here last you stood a long time beside me without uttering a word. I remember I’d just fed the cow when you took yourself off. Then I heard that you’d shot yourself, and I said to myself that perhaps you’d had something on your mind that you’d wanted to tell me of. Perhaps you had no money, I thought; and I’d like you to know that I would gladly have given you some.’”

“Home, happiness and safety were in that village so far away from here,” Richard continued to himself. “In this place not a soul knows me. Frau Zamell? Oh, yes, I could die again and she would mourn for me. What a stupid, useless thought! Someone, I dare say, would talk about me. I feel more and more sure that I’m in love with Frau Zamell. There must be something that stands firm amid all the unstable things of this restless life—something, something! The most beautiful thing is a heart, a tender, good, overflowing heart. A heart that needs protection is itself the best protection. Life’s a miserable business, never simple and orderly and unequivocal. What is Frau Zamell? A contradiction, a source of unhappiness. O tears of the forsaken! There is in this world an order, a brotherhood, of the lonely for whom there is no longer any heaven, only toil and sleep. Have I become ripe for joining this brotherhood? Ready to be resigned and to forget? She looked at me—ah, the way she looked at me! I saw a spirit which answered to my own. I saw desire and found love. Can it be all deception? Possibly, since nothing is impossible. The

impossible is only the unthinkable. Each man has his own particular portion of it, his unthinkable possessions. The needy is rich, the neediest

128

has the most of these unthinkable possessions. He doesn't realise their worthlessness. The envious want to rob the needy and so become needy. Good luck to them, I say."

A tram-car came from the direction of the station. Richard looked out between the curtains. Nothing was happening, everything was quiet. On the opposite side of the street the barber Weitner was standing before his shop door; he was still full of the accident and was looking for people with whom he could talk about it.

"I feel," Richard said, "that I should have to cry if I heard someone playing the piano. It would simply knock me over." The thought had occurred to him because the barber's daughter was accustomed to play the piano every evening—duets, practice pieces, simple melodies that always touched the heart at its most impressionable spot. Every sort of simplicity has that effect, especially the loud sort—the big cities with their restaurants and dance halls. How lovely is a wood in comparison! Or pasturage, ploughed land, stream, sea! In nature nothing is uniform, all is change, growth, the passing and renewal of life.

"O, I want to live!" Richard Tommsen whispered as he thought of Elisabeth Zamell.

Just then his landlady came to tell him that, the day being fine and warm, she had laid his breakfast on the balcony outside the kitchen. He went out. Through the air the swallows were gliding, flying low, for in such weather insects kept near the ground. A beggar rang the front-door bell, and the landlady, framed in the balcony door where Richard could see her, searched in her purse with exaggerated fuss for a five-pfennig piece. Richard felt this as a challenge, for he was still a month behind in his rent.

"Frau Krafft," he said, when the landlady had given something to the beggar, "has no money come for me yet? It must surely have arrived."

129

The landlady looked at him with vacant eyes and replied, "Oh, that's all right, I can wait."

Richard, to impress her, continued:



“Yesterday evening Frau Zamell said to me .... The landlady was listening attentively. He was succeeding in dispelling the doubt which her eyes had betrayed. “Frau Zamell told me that the Lammsdorf post-office is often short of ready cash for the payment of money-orders. But in any case I’ll inquire once more whether the advice-note has turned up.”

“There’s no occasion to hurry,” she said. “I’m quite sure of you.”

Richard did not think it wise to explain to her how little sure it was whether he would receive another remittance at all. His savings had been used up more quickly than he had expected. He was waiting now for a last remittance, which could not be large, and he owed money to more than one shop in Lammsdorf.

“Oh, I want to live!” was his thought.

Frau Zamell had told him that he would be very welcome at any time that he cared to call, and that she was expecting a visitor, a friend of her dead husband. “He was his closest friend,” Elisabeth had said, “a splendid fellow—you really must meet him.” And Richard wondered why.

He turned to his landlady. “Frau Krafft, do you know Italy?”

“It must be a beautiful place!” she replied, and her vacant eyes lit up. “My brother-in-law lives there.” She paused a moment and added:

“Do you know Frau Zamell well? She’s got money—this house belongs to her.”

Richard could not keep himself from laughing at her words.

“I want to live!” he thought, “I want to become what I really am!”

## CHAPTER XXII

EXCITEMENT reigned in Frau Zamell's house; Frederick Zurnieden had arrived during the afternoon. He had expected to meet a sorrowing widow, but Elisabeth was in excellent spirits, looking better and younger than a year before. He fell a ready victim to her charms.

At dinner William's place was vacant. He had vanished at the time of Frederick's arrival and was still absent at an hour before midnight. Elisabeth began to be anxious. She was sitting with Frederick in the drawing-room, sipping a glass of wine. They chatted of a thousand things but avoided any reference to the dead husband and friend.

At half-past eleven the maid reported that William had not yet returned; Elisabeth sent her to bed and confided to Frederick her anxiety about the youth's absence. Although the visitor insisted that he would wait up, the hostess did not retire till midnight, and then she began to wander restlessly about her bedroom.

It was not long before Frederick too was walking around the drawing-room. The door-bell rang at half-past one, and as he went to answer it Elisabeth in her nightdress rushed from her room. She was intending to open the door but, in her excitement forgetting the key, she came back and ran into Frederick's arms. Pallid and distraught she swayed upon her feet, whispering: "I'm afraid. Please stay by me, Frederick. An accident must have happened!" He led her into the drawing-room and went to the door. Before him, when he opened it, stood Richard Tommsen. The latter asked whether he might see Frau Zamell. Frederick replied that she could not be seen and asked whether there

131

were any news of William. "No," Richard answered, and Frederick closed the door in his face.

But Elisabeth had heard the voice and, moving unsteadily to the window, tried to open it so that she might call Richard back. She seemed to feel Frederick's clear cold eyes fixed on her, and beneath this glance she retreated from the window and lay down with closed eyes on the sofa when he came back into the room.

He bent over her and kissed the top of her head. "I will protect you, Elisabeth. You need not be afraid. I will guard you, and together we will wipe out the mistakes of the past." As he spoke and Elisabeth put her hand in his, a shot rang out in the street, quickly followed by a second shot.

Elisabeth sprang up and rushed to the window with Frederick at her heels. She flung it open. On the stone steps before the front door lay William.

Frederick carried him to the house. The boy had fired twice into the air, for he was one of those would-be suicides who fire but save themselves by missing aim, so that they may call attention to themselves. They got him into bed; he was in a fever and a little delirious. Frederick took possession of the pistol and commenced to question Elisabeth about the boy. What she related provoked him to question her more closely, until she divulged something of the truth. But he did not force her too far, for, as he lightly caressed her head, she fell again to begging for his protection. Once more he assured her of it, and kissed her forehead. Towards morning she fell asleep with her head against his shoulder; he laid her gently on the sofa, covered her with a wrap, and went into the boys' room, where he watched by William's bed till daylight.

In a few hours William was himself again. Frederick tried hard to bring home to the boy the folly of his conduct and the stupidity of his thoughts. William made a show of

132

deep contrition, and in the evening, while Frederick was in the room, begged Elisabeth to forgive him.

Elisabeth could not escape from her anxiety, but she concealed it. Frederick, for his part, bore himself in a manner that inspired a feeling of calm and security. The second day of his visit passed without any mention of Eric Zamell. On the third day he and Elisabeth set off for a ramble to Bestfeld. The weather was beautiful, the fruit trees all in bloom. She chose the route through the Wettertal and over the Feldberg, so that Frederick might enjoy from the hilltop a view of the charming country around Lammsdorf.

Shortly before they reached Bestfeld, Frederick asked suddenly:

"What manner of man was the fellow who called to see you at half-past one in the morning? I'd meant to ask you before."

“Oh, I made his acquaintance accidentally not long ago,” was the casual answer. “He’d seen Eric in his coffin. He saw you too at the same time. Did you not once fall asleep when you were watching beside the coffin?”

Frederick stared wide-eyed at Elisabeth. “What’s his name?” he asked.

“Tommsen, Richard Tommsen. He’s an architect, but he’s travelling for his health. He had a fall from a building.”

“When and where?”

“Some time ago—it was in Lübeck, I think.”

Frederick said no more. They reached Bestfeld and hurried into the Blue Lantern, an inn near the bridge. Passing into the garden they sat down at a table beneath a cherry tree from which the bloom was already falling. “It’s snowing petals,” Elisabeth remarked.

They drank coffee and after a while Frederick turned to Elisabeth:

133

“You were saying that this Herr Tommsen had seen me beside Eric’s coffin. You asked me whether I fell asleep. I don’t understand.”

“Neither do I,” Elisabeth replied. “It seems to me so sinister and occult.”

“You oughtn’t to let yourself be led away by such things,” Frederick broke in sharply.

“But tell me,” Elisabeth asked, “did you really go to sleep beside the coffin?”

“Yes, I did. I can’t deny it,” Frederick replied thoughtfully. “But who is this Herr Tommsen? How did you come to know him?”

Elisabeth avoided answering his questions. She talked of Eric, said that at times his suicide seemed quite unreal to her: twice already she had been awakened in the night by his voice distinctly calling her name; often she was unable to believe that he was dead, and it seemed to her that his terrible death had occurred only in a dream.

Suddenly she said: “It’s so good that you have come. I wish you could stay here always. Besides, William needs a man as a friend.”

“I want to talk to you about the boy,” Frederick interrupted.

“I am so glad!” Elisabeth answered, and began to chatter. She related how she had taken William into her house because her manager had suggested, or rather had hinted, that she should take an interest in the neglected boy. She described the progress in his education which she had soon been able to observe—his mother was no longer alive—and spoke of

his infatuation for herself as being purely a youthful sentimentality which was not to be taken seriously.

Frederick listened attentively, shaking his head from time to time as though he disagreed with one thing or another that she related. When she had finished speaking, he clasped her hand and said, "What a child you are, Elisabeth!"

134

He had a feeling of sympathy for this woman who deceived herself with such an air of gaiety and simplicity.

"You really are a big, innocent child," he repeated after a moment's reflection.

She smiled. There was something in her smile that touched him, and then it occurred to him for the first time that in his feeling for her there might lurk disloyalty to his dead friend. He had, indeed, told himself that Eric had failed to protect her, had been too exacting in what he asked of her. Suddenly he let her hand fall from his grasp and broke off the conversation.

As they were leaving the inn-garden he remarked: "The picture you have of William doesn't quite fit in with the facts. It would be a good thing if you were to send him away for a few weeks. You've got the necessary money: and it would be, in the circumstances, wisely expended." Elisabeth did not oppose the suggestion but she had no intention of following his advice.

They took the train back to Lammsdorf. At home, Elisabeth learned that Richard Tommsen had called to see her during the afternoon. More than that the maid did not know, for William, who had opened the door to the caller, was now out.

Elisabeth awaited his return impatiently. When he at last came in he was slightly drunk and stated in Frederick's presence that Herr Tommsen, in an interview with the police, had claimed to be the author of a certain letter found on the body of a man drowned in the river. Herr Tommsen sent his greeting to Elisabeth and assured her that she need have no apprehension on account of this letter.

At dinner that night William made it very plain that he had discovered, or shared in, a secret. Elisabeth flushed deeply; Frederick stared glumly before him, avoiding the glances she gave him from time to time. William, however,

was talkative, was in fact the only one who talked at all, and he often looked at the stern-featured Frederick as if at any moment he might venture upon the intimacy of “thou.”

After dinner Elisabeth asked William whether he would care to spend the coming summer in travel. As she asked this question Frederick was conscious of an intense, almost bodily, compassion for her. William’s reply was an impudent inquiry whether he were to be sent travelling because his presence had become inconvenient.

Frederick told the boy to accompany him to his bedroom. There he taxed him not only with his impertinent attitude but with his amazing ingratitude towards his benefactress. William made show of repentance—as might be expected of a nature such as his—and promised to apologize to Elisabeth. “Do so at once,” Frederick commanded.

Elisabeth would gladly have fallen on her friend’s neck in gratitude for his support. Yet she feared what might come of his conversation with the boy, and she waited with strained apprehension for Frederick’s return. She was ready to fly to him when she heard footsteps in the hall; but it was William, not Frederick, who entered the room. His wan face had an expression of hate. With hands in trouser pockets he faced Elisabeth and said:

“I will go away if you wish. But consider the matter once again. Perhaps you may soon need a witness to declare that you did not leave your house on that Friday night when the man drowned himself in the river. From your other friend, Herr Tommsen, I have learned much more about you than you suspect. As for the rest, I beg your pardon for my misbehaviour hitherto.”

Elisabeth stood dumbfounded, incapable of retort. William bowed and left the room.

## CHAPTER XXIII

FREDERICK ZURNIEDEN walked up and down outside the drawing-room for a quarter of an hour after he had dismissed William. Twice he had knocked upon the door, and when a third knock brought no answer he entered the room. Elisabeth lay weeping on the sofa in the corner. Her clenched hands were pressed against her temples; her body shook in her effort to control her tears, while she murmured: "O God, O God."

It was as though she were the guilty one, thought Frederick. Sympathy for the heart-broken woman went through him like a pain and made him feel weak.

"She loves the boy," he told himself. "How she must love him! She has asked for my help. Have I to protect her against herself, unhappy woman? Or is this another mystery? Letters found on a corpse? This Richard Tommsen? She seems terribly concerned about him—he has already tried to see her twice in the last three days, once even in the middle of the night. Has William just told her something about this man? Is it this that is making the boy suffer? Very likely it's not I but somebody else of whom he is jealous, and she only told me that to put me off the scent. Why then did she send for me? Why does she keep saying that I must protect her? Protect her from what? What a child she is—yet, though a child, a big child—I've told her she's a big, innocent child. But is she innocent? That's just what I'm in doubt about."

Frederick stood motionless. He wanted to take her in his arms, to comfort her and calm her. But that old feeling—a feeling of caution, a warning to think twice, of which he had been aware a year before on the balcony of the Zamells'

137

former house—now stirred within him and would not let him do what his compassionate heart demanded.

Elisabeth had not seen him enter the room; she still wept, abandoned to her misery. She longed for help, for comfort, for tenderness, for consideration, even for confession. She realised with terror that these two men, Richard and Frederick, for whom her feelings were becoming—as she knew—increasingly strong, stood in sharpest contrast to one another, a

contrast which, even though they had seen little of each other and knew still less, would inevitably end in a clash. She felt that she had already sacrificed William to one as much as to the other, had sacrificed this child whom she adored in her shallow way and who had tried to kill himself for her sake—for she would have been no woman had she not taken the laughable attempt at suicide for a genuine act of despair. For the love of one of these men, or perhaps only to please him, she had already let her affection for the boy be transformed into a maternal sentiment. For the love of the other, or perhaps out of gratitude, she had already banished the boy who probably cared for her with most tenderness, with most fidelity. She had done all this, so it seemed to her, wholly because of the contrast between these two men who contended with each other purely from a spirit of contradiction and not at all for the possession of herself. For the past three days she had striven, not deliberately but intuitively, to keep these two apart: it was necessary, at least it seemed to her to be necessary. Her intention had been good—for herself, of course. But now it had become an affair of deceptions, of suppression of the truth. It was no longer good, even for herself. It would be better now to confess everything. But to whom could she make her confession?

She was in perplexity. She longed for Frederick's hand. His was a touch of calm, of comfort, of protection. When his hand took her own and pressed it, tranquillity flooded her

138

heart. Her life then seemed to be set in order, to be simplified. And even though she could not conceal from herself that there was something tiresome and uninteresting about his presence, it was none the less necessary to her and a thousand times better than the futile disquietude of the days since her marriage with Eric. In spite of her prayer for forgiveness and of his promise to forgive, Eric had never got over that affair of hers, that affair which had now returned, after nearly four years, to disturb her. It was as though the dead had risen from the grave. Such had been her thought on that night when she had heard her name called in the street and, standing at the window, had seen Richard with the man whom, in defiance of Eric's devotion and attentiveness, she had loved almost a whole year through, until, with his disappearance, she had conquered her passion.

Elisabeth's weeping became more violent. Everything seemed to her more entangled, more disastrous than ever. All the past, which she had



thought dead and done with, had come to life again.

How tame, futile and unnecessary seemed to her at this moment those nights in the past when anxiety and fear had robbed her of sleep—a consequence of “nerves” or, at the worst, of loneliness. What she had then felt had been by no means pleasant, but it was nothing compared with this feeling of guilt, of being caught in a net of lies in which, now to deceive one man and now another, she had allowed her own life to be inextricably entangled.

She longed to be honest with herself, to speak the truth to herself, to confess all, down to the most trifling detail. She had to disentangle herself. She must, must escape from this unbearable load which would crush her unless she summoned one of these men, between whom her soul like a trembling beam of light fluttered to and fro, to bend over her and enfold her in all his protecting strength. She broke into a cry:

139

“Help me, help me!” she called.

Frederick laid his hand upon her head. In all his life there had been no moment to compare with this, as, beneath his gentle but firm touch, Elisabeth raised herself up and gazed at him with tear-filled eyes. Here was a woman who surrendered herself, gave herself entirely. He took her head between his hands. A feeling of rapture flowed through him and gave him words which drew from Elisabeth an answering smile of happiness. He spoke to her of love, of his love for her. In what he said there was a ring of honesty that gripped her heart. Those calm eyes of his could never lie; and as he bent over her and kissed her there glowed in those austere eyes a warmth and kindness which pierced the recesses of her soul and filled her with infinite exultation.

The happiness of the moment called up in the reserved and honest Frederick an overflow of emotion. He reminded her of Eric’s last words: “Take care of Elisabeth.” These words moved Elisabeth strangely: they seemed in a flash to bring her recollections of the dead husband into harmony with the present moment. Her whole being reached out to Frederick, unhindered, unrestrained.

In his glowing eyes the last trace of coldness and austerity had faded away. “Elisabeth,” he said, “I have loved you from the very first time I saw you.” He failed to perceive in her feeble response a hint that he had strayed from the path of strict truth. It was because he trod this path that she

admired him, and she would love him unreservedly if he were to lead her to tread it herself. And must she not have wondered—she who was conscious of so many frailties in the past—why, if he had indeed loved her from the first, he had not given her his protection from the first? Why, amid all the happiness of the moment, did she think of Richard Tommsen? Why would she not tell her lover, whom her arms encircled tenderly, of all that oppressed her?

140

None the less she remained silent, although her silence had soon become irksome and uncomfortable. As for Frederick, whose past life had been too simple and single-minded to disturb him in retrospect, he had given himself up to the present, taking pleasure in the tranquillity of the hour and in the beauty of the woman whom he now meant to guard as his own possession. His precise mind was already weighing up the trust, which was his dead friend's legacy to him, against the feeling for Elisabeth which was welling up within him; and he reached the conviction that, after all that had taken place, his emotions need no longer be held in check by loyalty to the dead and that now for the first time their freedom and vastness could do justice to the spirit of his departed friend.

Thus obedient to his thoughts and feelings, he held Elisabeth in a still closer embrace. But she, irked by the self-suppression which was foreign to her nature and intimidated by the emotional experience from which she had just emerged, misconstrued his tranquillity and felt his silence to be a confident challenge to her to lay bare to him all the confusion of her troubled heart. Yet his calm and reassuring presence added so keenly to her need of confession that she felt it almost as an anticipation of that happiness which springs from the perfect union of two beings. Timidly, cautiously, her hands crept over his face and breast as though to make sure yet again of his strength and protection, as though her heart feared to discover, in the very midst of his passionate avowals, that it was all a dream, a trick of futile imagination which anxiety and terror had conjured up to fool her with. But she knew at the same time that Frederick's presence with its assurance of protection was real and no vain dream. Her breast heaved deeply as she came to the moment of her confession ... then, suddenly, her good intention was shattered by his unexpected words. With the simple intimacy

141

of an unspoiled man Frederick held her tightly and said:

“I want you to be my wife, Elisabeth. I want to redeem the promise I gave to Eric. Will you be mine?”

“Yes,” whispered the woman who but a moment earlier had prepared herself to confess without reserve the tale of her sorry and unstable nature, prepared, had he but questioned her with understanding and sympathy, even to lay bare her complete unreadiness for marriage. “Yes,” she repeated, adding in a firm tone: “I want to be your wife.”

In the fullness of his happiness Frederick embraced her and kissed her on the mouth. But, to his surprise, she freed herself from his arms and said with a questioning intonation which seemed to him to need nothing but his answering assurance: “Now Eric lives no longer!”

It was acting on her part, an anticipatory probing to test the simplicity of her future husband, or a pretended fidelity to the husband who was dead. Or perhaps it was only to escape from a moment of embarrassment when she could find no other words to say. For she knew well enough that the man who sat beside her was still loyal to the dead friend who had been her husband, and she wished to set against this strong loyalty some evidence of her own which should at least appear to prove that she had only just succeeded in escaping from the old allegiance.

Frederick seemed not to have caught the significance of her last words. The complete surrender of her “Yes” had flooded him with happiness. Yet, as her words sank into his consciousness, he was somehow aware of an uncomfortable feeling which none the less he endeavoured to shake off, since he could find no explanation for it. He laughed at Elisabeth, called her “a dear silly woman” and, touched by her appearance of childish bewilderment, caressed and kissed

142

her. He was trying to escape from that ominous shadow which like a spectre moved across his emotion.

Elisabeth smiled brightly, responding to his play of affection. Yet that uncomfortable feeling, that shadow, remained. He asked her to play the piano. It must be something cheerful, light, gay.

She laughed, remarking happily that she really didn’t know anything of that sort. Besides, she did not want to get up and leave his side. Then, he retorted, she ought to have made William fix up a wireless installation—wireless could be such a delight. The mention of William gave her an

opportunity to say that she did not wish him to be sent away. "Let's go away ourselves—do say 'yes

Frederick was quite ready to agree; and he promised that he would be a good friend to the boy as well as a good father to her child. The shadow had lifted from him, replaced by his visions of the future. He chattered of the delights that family life could offer; but suddenly, in the very midst of the happy picture, he hesitated, fell silent and seemed to be entirely at a loss for something to say. Anxiously Elisabeth asked what was the matter.

"Nothing," he replied.

Elisabeth watched him apprehensively; he had blushed crimson. Then he spoke;

"But, Elisabeth, can you really be willing to marry me?"

"Yes," she assured him, "yes," and nestled closely in his arms.

He confessed to her the cause of his minute-long confusion. He was by profession an official, earning enough, but still not much. Elisabeth, on the other hand, had grown up accustomed to wealth and had never learned what it was to take care of money. Could she, then, still be willing to become his wife?

143

She broke into a peal of happy laughter, called him "her big baby" and said that she would rather give her answer in writing. She sprang up, hurried to her bedroom and, with an air both business-like and playful, brought back pen and paper. Seating herself solemnly at the table she wrote a few words and handed to Frederick a sheet on which he read: "Soap factory. Proprietor, Frederick Zurnieden, formerly Eric Zamell."

With a bound Frederick was on his feet before her. She was ready to throw herself into his arms, but he held her away and said:

"No, Elisabeth, that will never be. Don't expect it. Please don't ask it of me."

"Very well," she answered, "I won't ask it of you. But I am permitted to give you what I like. Besides, didn't Eric ask you to take care of his wife?"

"Yes, and that is what I mean to do," he replied. But the shadow had once more fallen across him.

At that moment the door-bell rang. Elisabeth was startled and, gripping Frederick's hand, looked across at the window. The curtains were closed, but she dreaded that it might be the other man, Richard Tommsen, who was standing at the door. Frederick guessed what she was feeling as he saw the

agitation of her strained face with its mute demand for protection. She leaned against him. He could feel the wild beating of her heart, and suddenly he understood what the shadow was that had twice fallen across him.

Elisabeth spoke. "Will you let him in?" The question astonished him. Nothing could have seemed less probable to him than that at this moment he should open the door to receive a stranger; moreover, it was already well past midnight. The shadow was upon him again, darkening his emotion like a disturbing pain.

"No," he said in a clear and decided tone. He was

144

fighting against the shadow, urged by a primitive instinct to defend himself.

Elisabeth in her agitation begged him for love of her to open the door. The door-bell sounded again, she shrank convulsively at its shrill tone. "Protect me," she whispered.

Then Frederick acted. He pressed her back into the corner of the sofa, crossed the room, pulled back the curtains, opened the window and leaned out. She heard his voice saying: "I'm just coming."

He turned and stood before her. She had risen to her feet.

"Two questions, dear child," he said. "Are you my betrothed?"

"Yes," replied Elisabeth with emphasis.

"Will you marry me?"

"Yes," she returned more softly.

"Good! I love you. Sit down. I'll let him in. What's his name?"

"Tommsen," she answered with startled eyes.

"Good!"

"Wait," she cried, and caught hold of his hand. "I am so grateful, I feel I must tell you ..."

A noise on the landing interrupted her words at the moment when she would have made her confession, when she would have poured out her heart to Frederick, keeping nothing back

Frederick too heard the noise. There was a knock at the door; it opened and William's head appeared.

"I'm disturbing you," he said, "but the door-bell has rung twice. Shall I answer it?"

"You're not disturbing us at all," Elisabeth answered.

Frederick could not understand why she said that, but he was annoyed by her words and, turning towards the door, ordered William to bed.

“Come here to me!” Elisabeth called to William in the

145

next moment; and the boy entered the room as Frederick left it.

Elisabeth was in a state of extreme excitement. She drew the boy down beside her on the sofa, listening intently and speaking at the same time. “You are not to go away,” she said. “You are to remain here. It isn’t always easy to be just. Why haven’t you gone to bed? Oh, if you only understood ... but now you’ll go off to bed.”

Her voice, as she spoke to William, scarcely finishing a single sentence, was full of deep anxiety. But he, noticing on the table the piece of paper on which Elisabeth had written, was reading it. He paid no attention while she spoke of being a second mother to him and of his promise to love her faithfully. Just then the door opened and Richard Tommsen, followed by Frederick, came into the room. She was suddenly silent; and, releasing William’s hand, smilingly held out her own to Richard. Frederick ordered William to go up to bed. Without a word the boy rose and left the room.

146

## CHAPTER XXIV

AS two o'clock approached Frederick looked for the tenth time at his watch. He had not yet taken part in the conversation but had watched Elisabeth and Richard. Every time that he met her glance her eyes seemed for a moment to blaze into his own.

Elisabeth was an admirable hostess. She knew when to speak and when to listen. Frederick noticed with a feeling of satisfaction how, when the conversation touched upon serious questions, she would avoid an expression of opinion, looking at him as though to suggest that he alone was competent to discuss such things. He told himself that this was evidence of her restraint and good breeding; and assured himself happily that the difference between them would be the best guarantee for the success of their life together.

Frederick observed Richard's clothes with critical eyes. The suit looked old and somewhat out at elbows, but it retained something of shabby distinction which is often found with starving artists or pensioned officers. His tie jumped out of place with every movement and threatened to slip over the edge of his collar. But his face did not repel Frederick, even though it failed to appeal to him—Frederick lacked the intuitive penetration to respond to it. But Richard reminded him of somebody, he knew not of whom; and whenever he glanced from Elisabeth to Richard, he asked himself where he could have seen the man before.

For the past two hours he had listened to a conversation the end of which he awaited with increasing impatience. His own thoughts and feelings had occupied him so much that he had scarcely taken in, except for an occasional moment, the words that Elisabeth was saying to her guest, and she

147

seemed, he could not say why, to intensify his impatience. He could not understand why she did not bring the talk to an end, although he recognized that she had every right to talk the whole night through. But whenever her glowing eyes looked into his own they seemed to lessen his irritation.

Suddenly he was aware that he could no longer attract her attention. She was staring at the table. He followed her glance. There on the table was a

box of cigarettes which she had put before her guest and, near it, the piece of paper with the words: "Soap factory. Proprietor, Frederick Zurnieden, formerly Eric Zamell." Richard's hand, which had been resting between the box and the paper, had picked up the latter and was toying with it. Frederick was very conscious of the nervous strain with which Elisabeth watched the moving hand; at the same time he heard Richard's words:

"Now, as I was saying, the woman who would suit me, that is to say ..."

Elisabeth interrupted. "Won't you take a cigarette?" she asked.

"Thank you." Richard dropped the paper and lit a cigarette before continuing:

"The woman must be beautiful without trying to be beautiful. When beauty is deliberate it loses its appeal, ceases to be beauty at all. For ..."

Frederick was no longer listening. He noticed that Elisabeth had become more and more agitated and that Richard had begun to play with the paper again. His eyes sought Elisabeth's, but she avoided them.

Richard was still speaking. "I believe," he said, "in fulfilment through one's fellow-creatures. Without that belief I could not live—I can never renounce it. This desire for fulfilment, for the union of two beings, is my mainspring: everything I think or do is set in motion

148

by it. If I sin against that belief, unhappiness will overtake me."

Frederick asked himself what it was the man was saying. Surely he had heard it all before? With a start he recalled that it was exactly the way his old friend Eric had written and talked. His eyes turned searchingly towards Richard. Elisabeth was rising to her feet.

Richard's hand was no longer playing with the paper. He was holding it motionless with the writing turned towards him and he seemed to be reading the words upon it. At least Elisabeth thought so and had jumped up to snatch the paper from his hand. But there was no need: Richard dropped the paper and was lighting a cigarette.

Elisabeth looked at Frederick across the top of Richard's head. He saw in her eyes a strength, a depth and intimacy which he had never seen before; and he flashed back at her a glance of confidence, happiness and gratitude. It pleased him, too, that apparently she meant to bring the visit to an end, but when he rose from his chair she asked him to fetch a bottle of wine and glasses.



He could scarcely believe his ears. An exclamation of surprise escaped him. But Elisabeth added: "Please do, I should like some," and he had no choice but to do as she asked. His face clouded with pain, and as he left the room—the door was not yet closed behind him—he heard Richard asking: "Is he really your friend?"

He felt the blood rush to his head, felt the shadow, more sinister, more oppressive than ever, fall across him. But to stand there listening was impossible. He closed the door quickly before he could hear Elisabeth's reply.

In the kitchen, while he tried to uncork the bottle, his hands trembled so violently that it slipped from them and broke against the floor. He sank for a few moments into a chair and then sprang up. "I must protect her, I must

149

help her!" he exclaimed. Possessed by the feeling that she needed his help, he hurried back into the room. Elisabeth stood leaning against the wall; Richard still sat at the table with his back to the door, in the act of extinguishing the stump of a cigarette. Neither of them was speaking, neither seemed to be aware of Frederick's return. He remained standing by the door, trying to catch Elisabeth's eye. But she stood motionless with lowered eyelids.

"I am so sorry," Frederick interposed, "the bottle slipped from my hand and broke."

Elisabeth seemed about to answer, when Richard rose and said, "I must ask you to excuse me now." He held out his hand to Elisabeth. Neither spoke. In silence too Frederick accompanied the guest to the door.

Elisabeth awaited his return with outstretched arms and, before he could speak, flung herself upon his breast. Her arms encircled him closely as she cried:

"You must never go away, never leave me alone, not for a single moment! You must always, always stay by me!"

Frederick, relieved and breathing again after two hours which from being at first tiresome had become sinister and agonizing, held Elisabeth tightly to him and kissed her repeatedly. But as he stood with her head upon his shoulder, he saw the sheet of notepaper, whereon she had named him proprietor of the factory, lying in fragments upon the carpet beside the table.

“What does that mean?” he asked, releasing her and pointing to the torn paper.

Elisabeth cried out in answer: “Don’t let me go! You must never let me go again!”

To his reiterated question she replied, “You needn’t want to know anything about it. You’ve already promised that you will take over the factory.”

“Yes, yes,” he agreed, but felt none the less that there had

150

been an affront to him, a disparagement of him, for he supposed that it was Richard Tommsen who had torn up the paper.

“I meant it for your good,” Elisabeth said.

“What, was it you who tore up the paper?” was his astonished question.

“Yes,” she answered.

Frederick could scarcely believe it. Her “Yes” sounded forced and he suspected that she was keeping back the truth from him. Although she repeated that she had done it, he experienced a strange disquietude. A few minutes of silence passed painfully for both of them.

Elisabeth said to herself that he was jealous and therefore he did not believe her. But instead of recognizing that he had good reason, she felt hurt, for in her eyes jealousy, justified or not, was a fault; and she argued, with the illogicality of her weak nature, that if he were jealous she had done rightly in tearing up the paper. Thus she justified herself in what she had done. That she had torn up the paper not from the love of Frederick but from a sort of bashfulness towards Richard was a matter of no importance beside the fact that she had been disbelieved when she had spoken the truth. That she had spoken the truth from a dishonest motive, that thus, since the truth was not the whole truth, she had given him reason to doubt her,—these considerations did not touch her. But she was somehow aware of them, for she added:

“You oughtn’t to doubt my word, Frederick.”

Her words, sounding like a veiled request for forgiveness, appealed to him irresistibly.

“It was a good thing, darling, that you tore up the paper,” he said. “I don’t want to know anything about the factory, you must be aware of that. But you ought to realise at the same time that it’s bound to annoy me when other people,

such as this acquaintance of yours, mix themselves up with our affairs.”

“He has never done that,” she replied in Richard’s defence.

“I’m quite prepared to believe you, dear child,” he answered. But after a pause he returned to the subject:

“He asked you whether I really were your friend. I heard that as I was leaving the room.”

“And don’t you know what my answer was?” she asked craftily.

Unsuspectingly Frederick admitted that he didn’t.

“That’s a pity,” was the ambiguous rejoinder. “But I’m too shy to tell you.” He did not press her to tell him, and she inquired whether he would care to know.

“No,” he exclaimed, “no!”

He was in fact most anxious to know, but he was sure that he would not hear the truth from her. The shadow was over him again. He stood in silence and stared moodily at the pieces of paper lying on the carpet.

It was already three o’clock and he begged her to go to bed. Neither of them said more about the wine. In the morning the maid would find the broken bottle on the kitchen floor.

## CHAPTER XXV

THE slightest ground for jealousy raises me above her.” That was Eric Zamell’s most characteristic avowal, when he alleged that he was not jealous but only sought intensely. But what did he seek? Was it a reason for jealousy that he was seeking? That would have been a truly dreadful business, and his avowal would have been a self-revelation that sprang from the depths of an agonizing jealousy.

Because of this unreasonable jealousy he had put out a sentry in the world of appearances, a sentry whose duty was to seek out, and send word of, any discoverable reason for jealousy. And the most trifling reason served to nourish his jealous vanity.

Yet he sought to rid himself, no matter at what cost, of this jealousy. He was affected by its torture, if not by a recognition of its baselessness; or perhaps both affected him at the same time.

The sentry reported, for instance, that Elisabeth was moving her right hand. Then why was she moving it? The sentry reported that she was reading and had not glanced at her husband for the past half-hour. Why, why? What woman could tolerate this sentry who reported this, that or the other trifle, evoking a “why?” with every report? To that Eric would have made answer that Elisabeth, the wife in whom he believed, had marred his ideal picture of her as a woman to be worshipped, particularly since the day when the Recluse had been attracted to the house and she, dividing her energy in confusion between two men, had been forced to realise that the fidelity she gave to one was infidelity to the other. When, then, she had brought Eric’s love into

153

subjection, she lived with a constant feeling of guilt towards the other man, a feeling from which she was first released by her husband’s suicide. She was anything but a clear-thinking woman. Her notions about duty and obligation, right and wrong, were neither stable nor sharply defined; they were at the mercy of her emotions which, like the moon, waxed and waned. One day she was completely a creature of impulse, the next she would let herself be astonishingly moved by some ethical consideration which, though its effect might doubtless be good, yet made no impression beyond

a day or indeed an hour. In just the same way her self-assurance was fickle. She could not recognize the limitations of her powers, nor realise how insecure was her certainty. On one hand she lived with a constant feeling of guilt which was in sharp opposition to her innocence, and, on the other hand, accepted with frivolous readiness responsibilities which she neither was able to bear nor had any intention of bearing. The consequence of her so contradictory nature was a desire to avoid any sort of strife and to escape from any undertaking which might cost her an effort to fulfil.

After the events of the night which have been recorded peace descended upon the Zamell dwelling. There was silence except for the ticking of the clocks. Every room was in darkness. None the less, three people lay awake unable to sleep.

Elisabeth was sitting up in bed with clasped hands as if she were praying. She was, in fact, doing nothing of the sort. In the adjoining room William was turning on his bed, weeping, biting the pillow, in an alternation of melting sentiment and numb hatred. In the spare bedroom at the back of the house Frederick was meditating over Elisabeth and himself: now at last when he was free of her immediate presence his mind could review all the events and words of the previous hours, and that shadow, which from time to

154

time had startled him, fell with increasing darkness on his soul. How was he to describe his parting from Elisabeth when he had accompanied her as far as her bedroom? Beautiful, satisfying, terrifying or sinister? He could not decide. Gloomily he had wished her good night. Gloomily she had offered him her hand. He had already turned to go when she detained him and asked:

“Can you go from me thus?”

He had pressed her hand, looked at her with a searching and penetrating glance before replying:

“Can you become my wife? No, not thus!”

Thereupon she had wept and asked whether he wanted to leave her.

“No, not leave, but admonish,” was his answer. What had she done? she had asked. She must surely know that well enough, he had retorted.

“I love you, Frederick,” she had cried out so loudly that her words must have been heard through three rooms. Then had followed impassioned kisses, until, tearing himself away from her, he had left the room.

Elisabeth heard William crying. She listened, and whispered, "He too, he too!"

But soon her thoughts returned to Richard Tommsen. She could not forget that question he had asked her. "Are you playing with me too?" These words had closed the short conversation which had begun with "Is he really your friend?" "What do you take him for?" had been her answer, and Richard had replied, "He could become my best friend, but then he dare not be yours." "And why not?" she had returned excitedly. "I must crush him or he will crush me," he had answered. "He would never do that while he loved me," she had cried out pathetically, and had torn to pieces the sheet of notepaper. It was then that Richard had asked her, "Are you playing with

155

me too?" Frederick's return to the room had put an end to the conversation. She had not been able to give Richard her answer. Silently he had taken his departure, silently she had let him depart. No word of return had been spoken.

"Are you playing with me too?" How this question plagued her now! How it throbbed in her blood and tortured her thoughts with its repetition! "Are you playing with me too?" That sentence had struck home. But it had no right to wound her, she thought. It had no right, she would not allow it to wound her! She fought against it with all the strength of mind and emotion. But like a dagger the question lay buried in her—whatever she thought, whatever she felt, the pain of it was always there. She laughed. It was too ridiculous, she assured herself. Across the distance that divided her from the man who had said it she called to him that his question was ridiculous, had left her untouched, for, though with him she might indeed be playing, for that very reason she did not play with Frederick. Oh yes, he should see, he should learn his lesson, he should be forced to recognize how much he had deceived himself!

She sprang out of bed, put on her bedroom slippers and left the room. Across the hall she crept noiselessly, so that William should not hear her, and tapped on Frederick's door. She had determined to confess everything to him.

Frederick was awake, and answered questioningly, "Yes?"

"It is I," Elisabeth whispered. "Are you already in bed?"

"Wait a moment, I'll unlock the door."

“Oh no, don’t get up. I thought you weren’t in bed. Please don’t get up. I’ll tell you all about it in the morning.”

“I’ll open,” he called and hastened to the door.

“No, not now!” she said loudly. “I can’t bear any more now. To-morrow early. Sleep well!”

156

When he opened the door she was already back in her room.

But sleep was impossible for either. At half-past five the fire-engine came along the Ringstrasse and stirred in Elisabeth memories of that night when the Recluse had drowned himself. Someone had seen him as he sprang over the railing of the Bestfeld bridge and had given the alarm. Three hundred yards downstream where the river was shallow they had fished him out of the water, with not a spark of life left in him.

William had heard the bell of the fire-engine and was reminded of that night. At that time he had taken Richard to be Frederick’s friend and had experienced the first bitter pangs of jealousy. But to-day Richard seemed to him a secret ally against the intruder Frederick who had already filched possession of the factory and meant to send William away in order to take undisturbed possession of Elisabeth as well.

But since the day of Frederick’s arrival William had had his eyes opened, to use his own phrase. He was now seeking to get behind the events that were happening around Elisabeth and he gave an attentive ear to the gossip of the town. In the factory office his face no longer beamed; where he had once been shown the deference due to a favourite of the proprietress, he was now maliciously asked whether he had fallen into disgrace. He possessed neither the courage nor the assurance to counter such mockery. The satisfaction of his colleagues—a satisfaction which masqueraded as sympathy—betrayed him into expressions disloyal to Elisabeth. As though these marks of his disloyalty were only to be expected, he was now made to hear all the offensive tattle about her; he learned of long-past events, of her marriage and of her relations with the Recluse who, after living in her house, had disappeared and but lately had sought death willingly as an escape from his misery. The whole town was talking

157

of the suicide and it was said that papers, revealing Elisabeth's part in the tragedy, had been found upon the body.

While, the day before, Elisabeth and Frederick had been on their excursion to Bestfeld, William had returned to business an hour late after lunch. The manager had sent for him and inquired the reason for his unsatisfactory behaviour. William's reply had been evasive, whereupon the old man had warned him to cease making disloyal remarks about Frau Zamell, some of which had been reported to him. The boy had burst out laughing as soon as he had come out of the manager's office.

Later in the afternoon he had answered the door when Richard Tommsen had called to see Elisabeth, and had been sharply snubbed in attempting to become confidential with the visitor. His talk at dinner that evening—the story about letters found in the Recluse's pocket and claimed by Richard as his own—was an invention, a combination of various bits of gossip that he had heard. He had determined to frighten Elisabeth and to make her realise at all events that she was at his mercy.

He meant to find out everything he could about her. This was to him a means, indeed the only means, of escape from the torture of his jealousy. He was resolved that events should yield to him their secret. Nothing that he had heard about Elisabeth damaged her in his eyes. What she did and what she was had no meaning for him except in so far as the knowledge of her misdemeanours might give him power over her. He would use her past as a threat to compel her to send away the intruder whom he hated with all his heart as a rival. He would keep his eyes open, so he declared; yet he was totally blind so far as Elisabeth was concerned. He would arm himself with every weapon of threat, at best some sin she had committed, so that he would be able to force her to drive away the hated rival.

158

"I shall stop at nothing," he told himself. "I will not let myself be frightened. Here I have put my foot, here I remain. Elisabeth belongs to me, as I belong to her. If she were to ask me to save her from the intruder, I would shoot him on the spot. It would be happiness to me. I no longer have any other feeling."

Only the space of three rooms divided the jealous boy from his rival, who, fighting vainly against the shadow that weighed on him, could not sleep and had switched on the light.



It was not William's words at dinner that had kept Frederick awake. "To him they were no more than the chatter of a tipsy youth in whose brain conjectures had usurped the place of facts. That Elisabeth could be in any way concerned with a corpse found in the river seemed to him preposterous. He knew the worthlessness of drunken garrulity; but it vexed him that this boy of seventeen dared to be fuddled in Elisabeth's presence without a sign of disgust or a sharp reproof from her. He saw in William a good-for-nothing and coarse-natured youth, spoilt by an indulgent woman who persuaded herself that she was educating him and who made incomprehensible excuses for him, despite his, Frederick's, warning that the results would be lamentable. He told himself that he would have to intervene with an iron hand, and that she would then quickly realise that what he did was only for her good.

No, not because of this had there fallen across him that persistent and oppressive shadow. Here were only clear questions and clear answers.

His brain worked intensely. Whence, he asked, came this oppression, this mysterious disturbance of his emotion? Once more all the events of the day passed before his eyes, once more his thoughts returned to the road toward Bestfeld along which he had walked with Elisabeth. He saw her in her flimsy summer dress, straw hat in hand, walking beside

159

him across the fields, through the wood and up over the ridges of the hills. He had carried her leather hand-bag, while she had pointed out to him the features of the country, the valleys and the hills that rose beyond the river. They had been in a merry, laughing mood. Where the path had been steep she had held his hand or clung to his shoulder. Thus they had wandered on until the village of Bestfeld had come into view. Elisabeth had pointed out to him the various properties she had acquired. To his inquiry why she had bought them, she had replied, "Investment, my manager said; but I mean to sell again. What do you think about it? Have you enough money for your needs?" He had shaken his head, laughing. "We've reached the end of our journey," she had said, "look, there's the village!" It was then that Frederick had plunged into the subject which had been worrying him; he had asked her about Richard Tommsen. She had replied that this Richard Tommsen had seen Eric in his coffin and Frederick asleep beside it.

At this point a startling thought came to Frederick. Was he on the track of something? Had he discovered a link between the events of that time and

those of the present? Had he found the cause of the shadow? Suddenly he sat up in bed, peered round the room, at the furniture, window and curtains, as though he suspected that someone were watching him. His thoughts ran in confusion. In a moment recollection, suspicion, confirmation, anxiety and unrest pressed on him from all sides. That man who had been brushing his trousers as though in preparation for a journey, that man was Richard Tommsen! Now he saw the resemblance. But what was there in it, what did it mean? Had Richard at that time, in the very night while Frederick had watched beside the coffin, also been in the house? It was indeed something mysterious and occult, as Elisabeth had said. The night before his departure rose distinct in

160

Frederick's mind. He had heard how someone left the house, how the front door had been shut and steps had sounded in the street. But what was there in it, what did it mean?

Frederick listened intently. He had heard a noise, a voice. Did someone call? Had Elisabeth called? Had she not told him that already twice in the night she had been awakened by Eric's voice calling her name? Frederick strove to convince himself that it was all nonsense, strove to remain calm and reasonable. He called up all his capacity for reason to overcome his feeling of fright. He would not lose his head, would not be superstitious.

But then he heard the cry once more. So it *was* a cry, he told himself; and he was aware of strange anxiety, an anxiety which was independent of his excitement and did not come from his over-tired and over-strained senses: it was an anxiety for Elisabeth, a feeling that she had called for help, for protection. He sprang from the bed and dressed with utmost haste. He meant to go to her. He had to see whether anything had happened. He opened his bedroom door, moving very quietly so that he might disturb no one. Then he drew back with a start. Richard was there, stepping from the darkness of the hall towards the lighted doorway as though to enter the room.

Summoning all his strength, Frederick shouted at the top of his voice, "What do you want? Go away, go away!"

The figure vanished before his eyes.

Elisabeth rushed from her room, William from his. The child, wakened by Frederick's shout, began to cry.

Frederick tried to explain what had happened. Elisabeth was trembling. William, laughing half with fright, half with malice, switched on the light in his bedroom. The child calmed down sooner than the grown-ups.

Elisabeth told William to go back to bed. Then she

161

questioned Frederick. He was to tell her everything. She took his hand and pulled him into her bedroom. She would not let him leave her.

Frederick told her of the apparition, which he explained as an illusion of the senses, an illusion which could best be dispelled by an act of physical exertion, and that was why he had shouted as loudly as he could.

"I was coming to you," he said, "I thought you had been calling. I heard a noise, a voice."

"You heard it too?" Elisabeth interrupted, clinging to him with an expression of terror.

Frederick held her up. "I thought you were calling me," he said. Elisabeth shook her head emphatically. "I didn't," she whispered. "It was Eric calling ... my name!"

"That was an illusion too," Frederick said in an effort to convince himself. She was trembling silently in his arms. He felt it was best to say no more, but his arms tightened around her shaking body.

The grey light of dawn showed in the sky, the night was over, but he did not move from her side. Neither slept or spoke. Only when William, roused by the maid, had dressed and left the house, did Frederick move to go.

"You will soon be my wife," he said and kissed her. "It will be a new life for us. Let us both fight against the shadows of the past."

Elisabeth closed her eyes. She had no answer for him. Frederick stood up and left the room. He felt he had been cheated of her response.

162

## PART FIVE

163-164

## CHAPTER XXVI

**A**T five o'clock, the hour fixed for the burial of the Recluse, the bells would begin to toll. Richard glanced at his watch; there was more than an hour before the ceremony.

It was hot weather, as hot as when Eric Zamell was buried. The barber Weitner stood before his door, while his daughter—the one who played the piano of an evening—reclined beside the first-floor window, thoroughly bored with herself. Her father was speaking to a customer, for whom he stepped aside to allow him to enter the shop. Richard, watching, recognized Frederick Zurnieden.

“He’s got money,” Richard thought. “Already I owe my landlady two months’ rent, and for the last five days I’ve had no breakfast.”

He looked down at the shop and through the window at the heads of Frederick and the barber. Without a doubt they were looking up at him, and the barber seemed to be explaining something.

“Yes, I do live here,” Richard continued. “But not for much longer, two or three days perhaps, and Frau Krafft will turn me out. Then I shall stand down there in the street. Get on with your job, Uncle Weitner. Get on with your shaving. How bored the duet-playing Fraulein Weitner looks! She’d much rather be lathering the customers in the shop. Two days ago she had her hair cut like a boy’s. Even that old she-goat Frau Krafft was saying that long hair got in the way, but her husband won’t let her wear it short, and he said yesterday evening that she looked stupid enough already. I owe her seventy marks. For the sake of a haircut she’d let the filthy lucre go. I think I’ll suggest it as the

165

price of my persuading her husband. ‘Krafft,’ I’ll say to him, ‘how can you amble along so far behind the times? It’s years since there’s been such a distinguished fashion. Consider the human head—what a thing a woman’s head is! Just look, what a dainty head your wife has! You’ve no notion what it’s like, there’s so little of it that can be seen. I assure you, it’s as dainty as a nut.’”

The cathedral clock struck four. “How hot it is! How burning the light seems!” he went on. “I shall see the poor devil into his grave. I’ve informed

Elisabeth—she'll have had my postcard this afternoon or even this morning. I just wrote on it: 'At five to-day is the burial. I shall be thinking of you.'"

"Did she love him? I think she was only playing with him. She has never yet been in love. That is something she has yet to experience."

By this time Weitner had stropped his razor and the apprentice had finished the lathering. Weitner snorted at him: "Get away." The boy hurried to the basin and washed his hands. Never before had he washed after lathering a customer. Weitner began to shave, no doubt remarking: "You haven't been long in Lammsdorf. I can see that at once—you haven't developed the Lammsdorf face. I can always tell that in a moment. Now let me explain: all of us in this town have something of the lamb about us." That was his customary joke, but woe to the lathered stranger who omitted to laugh. The lamb Weitner would poke him in the side, exactly in a spot between the fourth and fifth ribs on the left. He would do it as if by accident, calling to the apprentice: "Why don't you get out of the way? One day you'll make me cut someone and then there'll be trouble."

But evidently Frederick had laughed. He must have laughed furiously over that joke, for Weitner came to the

166

door and chuckled, while the boy wiped Frederick's chin. "Wash it properly, boy," Weitner said, "the soap clings—the fat isn't spared in making it. Zamell's soap—perfect—best of the lot. Zamell is still Zamell! Sixpence a piece. Will you be sprayed with eau-de-Cologne?" He didn't say *Kölnisch Wasser*, for that in his opinion was a valueless imitation of the genuine article.

At last the performance was finished and Eric Zamell's old friend and comrade—a fine, splendid fellow, as Elisabeth had said—was shaven once more. Weitner bowed and pointed again to the opposite house.

"Devil take it, he's coming over here!" thought Richard. "Herr Zurnieden means to pay me a visit. I'll spare him a quarter of an hour, and then I must go to the funeral!"

Frau Krafft opened the door to Frederick, looking at him with curiosity and distrust. She thought that anyone who asked for her lodger might be the bearer of a summons or a writ.

"Yes, he's at home," she said.

“Where?” Frederick asked. “Which room?” Frau Krafft replied: “He lives here as a lodger—the furniture is all mine. This way,” she added. “If he doesn’t answer, he’s still in bed. Knock on the door.”

Hearing a response, Frederick entered the room. Richard offered him a seat and one of his five remaining cigarettes.

“I have come,” Frederick began, “about a strange matter.”

“Indeed,” Richard replied. “Won’t you smoke a cigarette? Here’s a light. In a quarter of an hour I must go to the cemetery. My friend, of whom you have already heard, is to be buried to-day.”

“I know,” Frederick said as he lit the cigarette. “Frau Zamell told me about it. She asked me ...”

167

“Ah, so you’ve come at Frau Zamell’s request,” Richard interrupted.

“No, no, not at all!” Frederick assured him. “I’ve come entirely of my own accord. It is necessary for me to discuss with you certain—how shall I put it?—certain happenings. Frau Zamell merely asked me to look at this house when I had an opportunity. You know, I suppose, that she bought it last year. She has a certain amount of trouble with the tenants—they don’t pay the rent as they should.”

“So far as concerns my landlord and landlady,” Richard said, as he began to smoke, “I must take the blame if they haven’t paid their rent when due. I ...

Frederick brushed the explanation aside:

“Only this morning your landlady told Frau Zamell the reason. You haven’t settled your bill for the last two months, I believe. But, let me repeat, that is not the reason of my visit. That difficulty has been settled otherwise. Frau Zamell has excused the people from payment of two months’ rent. But it is quite a different matter that brings me here.”

“I know,” Richard answered, and looked Frederick steadily in the eyes.

“You know it partly, perhaps,” Frederick said somewhat brusquely, and continued:

“I must go back a little way if I am to make myself clear to you. From Frau Zamell you have probably heard that her husband Eric Zamell, who died last year, was my best friend. We were war comrades. The experiences, the dangers, the joys in which we shared, formed a tie between us which survived all the years when we were separated. Our reunion last year proved it in the most affecting way. My friend was a good-hearted but

over-sensitive man, and his sudden death, his suicide, was more the culmination of a nervous upheaval than a clearly intentioned act.

Responsibility  
168

for it, I should say ... but why do you smile?" Frederick asked, interrupting himself.

Richard's reply was assured and deliberate, as though he were entirely certain of what he was saying:

"The deed was quite intentional, contemplated and foretold days before by Eric Zamell himself. It is true that the responsibility for it rested with somebody else."

"How do you know that?" Frederick asked. "Why do you want to think that?"

Richard answered:

"I know it. And the fact that I know it is the reason of your being here."

"I can't deny," Frederick exclaimed, "that I have come here to demand from you an explanation of certain—what shall I say?—interferences which are beginning to make not only myself but Frau Zamell somewhat apprehensive. I expect of you that you are prepared to tell me, with entire honesty ..."

"Don't put it that way, if you please," Richard interrupted. "You know perfectly well that you have no right to demand anything or to expect anything of me. I am ready to talk to you quite candidly, so far as that is possible for me." Then with an odd smile he added: "You will not have forgotten that only a short time ago you closed the door in my face."

"By Frau Zamell's wish," said Frederick.

"Oh no!" Richard exclaimed. "I'm not talking of that occasion but of this morning when you were alone in your room. You were startled, I admit, but what a way to shout at me!"

Frederick was silent in bewilderment. Could the man be referring to the apparition of the early morning? Frederick could not believe that he had heard aright.

"I am myself upset about these visits which frighten you,"

169

Richard said. "They happen unintentionally. I mean to say, they happen because of a force within me which I simply cannot clearly explain. For the



only reason I could give would be ... yes ...” He suddenly stopped.

Frederick looked searchingly at Richard’s face but could see no sign that the man was joking. He neither looked nor sounded as if he were not serious. But there was something hostile in his manner. There was a struggle for mastery between them. Frederick was by nature unaggressive, but he was determined not to submit. That was why he was there at all. He was conscious of being the aggressor and yet of being at the same time the weaker of the two. He certainly had no fundamental desire to pit himself against Richard in any way whatsoever. But he had promised Elisabeth his protection, and he felt instinctively that it was from this quarter, from this man, that danger threatened her. He could in no way justify the assurance of this feeling, and he had no wish for a trial of strength with Richard. His only purpose was to discover who this man was. He meant to take stock of him, to weigh up the danger which threatened both himself and Elisabeth—for as he judged the situation it was one and the same thing, whichever of them were in danger. He was determined to come to grips with Richard—who was the danger—to unmask him, to crush him. There was in Frederick no feeling of jealousy lest he might have to share with this man Elisabeth’s partiality or love. No, there was nothing of that, for he believed simply and unhesitatingly every word she had said to him. Yet there was something in her that kept him at bay, a mysterious barrier which lay across her like a weight of fear, a secret and persistent fear. She had confessed it only this morning, but she herself seemed not to know its reason, or at least she did not divulge it. He felt that she was unable to give herself wholly up to him, to lay her soul bare to him. Something

170

stood in the way which caused her to act against his wishes, his feelings and expectations—something against which she appeared to be powerless. Then, at such a time, there fell across his soul the shadow which tortured him. He had questioned her about Richard that afternoon, shortly before he came out, and had asked what Richard had told her of himself. He had reminded her of what she had said to him on their excursion, how Richard had seen Eric laid in his coffin, and him, Frederick, asleep beside it. Had Richard been in the house by pure chance? Where had she made his acquaintance? But Elisabeth’s answers were unsatisfactory, they failed to calm him, they distressed him, for her words impressed upon him the fact

of her subjection to this man. She called it fear. But was it that? Or what was it?

“Are you an occultist?” Frederick asked Richard, as the latter remained silent.

Richard shook his head.

“That sort of thing is the greatest nonsense, to my way of thinking,” Frederick added.

“I have never concerned myself with such things, know nothing of them,” Richard answered. “I go my own way, that’s all.”

“But you meant to give me some explanation,” Frederick said.

Richard laughed. It was a queer laugh, hostile, comical or helpless. Frederick was baffled by it.

“Yes, but do you know what a Schabeu is?” Richard asked, looking at Frederick with expectant eyes.

For a moment it occurred to Frederick that the fellow was crazy or was poking fun at him. But a sense of fright supervened when Richard continued:

“I can’t tell you precisely what a Schabeu is. I can only tell you to look at me—I am a Schabeu—that’s all. I don’t want to say more than that,”

171

And, as Frederick maintained an apprehensive and strained silence, Richard went on:

“A Schabeu is a man who is attracted to the light that burns beside a corpse. But you see, I am a human being just as you are. I don’t mean by that to intrude upon you or to compare myself with you. I know that I am a ruined existence. To a certain extent we all are that to-day. But we fall into two great classes, those who surrender to the decadence and those who try to resist it. The former, unable to stand alone, go with the crowd, amid shams, stupidity and confusion. The latter, people like myself, want to be alone but cannot ultimately endure it. This morning when I visited you ... you are so tactful and responded to my visit immediately, for which I’m grateful ... this morning it was nothing but the horror of being always alone that drove me to visit you.... I am often haunted by the decadence of the world ... then when all that takes hold of me, I force myself on someone ... as I did then ... I call that the division of my personality ... were you not Eric Zamell’s closest friend? ...”

Suddenly Richard stopped. Could it have been Frederick's widely staring eyes that made him hesitate? He stood up, walked to the window and after drawing once or twice at his cigarette threw it into the street. Then he turned to his visitor, who had just risen to his feet, and said:

"Don't think what I am now saying, or my visit to you this morning, is all nonsense. Since you are Elisabeth Zamell's friend, you cannot be mine, and for the same reason I do not wish to be hers. I presume that in coming here you want to assure yourself about me. I have been quite frank with you, now tell me as plainly what you want with me."

Frederick's face betrayed increasing astonishment. He was unable immediately to answer this challenge—for such

172

he felt Richard's words to be. But he realised instantaneously that he must bring the visit to an end, and so with a voice hesitating with embarrassment, yet drawling threateningly, he uttered the sentence which, when he entered the room, he had been ready to fling in Richard's face, the sentence which was to proclaim his guardianship over Elisabeth: "I am betrothed to Frau Zamell."

Richard made no reply. He stood unmoved and rigid. His indifference did not escape Frederick, who none the less was conscious of a feeling of jealousy.

"My fiancée and I," he continued, "request you not to congratulate us nor to visit us during the coming weeks, because ..."

At that moment the cathedral clock began striking. Frederick bowed slightly to Richard, and proceeded:

"Because we are approaching what is for us a very sad anniversary. It was a year ago ..."

He stopped. Was Richard listening to him? What was happening to the man? What meant that unwavering stare while his hands played with his watch-chain? What meant that nod of his head? Then came Richard's voice, a sad monotone that strangely touched Frederick's heart:

"A year ago it was you who went to the cemetery. To-day it must be I. I hope you will recognize the inference. Good-day, Herr Zurnieden."

"Good-day, Herr ... Herr ... I keep forgetting your name!"

"Schabeu. Just call me Schabeu."

173

## CHAPTER XXVII

FREDERICK was in agitation as he hurried through the streets. "This can't go on. I must protect Elisabeth from this man," he told himself. "Every word he speaks to her is like a poison against which she is powerless. Even I cannot resist his nonsense. Everything he says unsettles me. Elisabeth must go away. I'll go with her. I'll return to-day or to-morrow to arrange leave—a month or three months. Ah, Eric, my dead friend, I will leave no stone unturned in order to make Elisabeth happy. I was to protect her, you told me. I *will* protect her."

As Frederick hurried into No. 17 Ringstrasse, Richard was already on his way to the cemetery. He moved with difficulty, almost with a slouching gait. From the cathedral tower sounded the monotone of a bell—not the powerful peal to the accompaniment of which Eric had been buried. Now it rang out over Lammsdorf like an execution-bell.

At the cemetery the coffin was lowered into the grave without ceremony—no oration, no onlookers, no mourners. Richard alone was there, except for the grave-diggers and a young clergyman. No prayer save *Our Father* was offered, that and nothing more. When it was over, the young clergyman turned to Richard and inquired whether he were a relative, friend, or whatever might be, of the dead man. Richard glanced up and was about to answer when he espied Elisabeth, dressed all in white, a white parasol in one hand and a bunch of flowers in the other, at the far end of the path which led towards the open grave. He left the clergyman where he stood and hurried towards her. She too quickened her pace as she saw him approaching.

Richard grasped her hand and said: "Good, I'm so

glad you are here. You won't go home immediately, will you? You'll stay with me? I thank you—you made Frau Krafft a present of the rent I owed her. I have already given her notice that I am leaving. It is really delightful that I've met you. The sky is blue. Can't you see how blue it is? That's how it ought always to remain, day after day, week after week. But let us get away from the cemetery or I shall think your white dress out of place. Will

you promise me to make no retort if I say something now? Promise me, will you?"

Elisabeth nodded her head reluctantly, but it was still a nod of assent.

"How beautiful you are!" Richard exclaimed. His pace quickened so that he almost ran from her. She had difficulty in keeping up with him.

Suddenly he swung round and faced her. "She doesn't laugh, she doesn't laugh," he thought. Then he said:

"Let us hasten, let us fly away, far away! Will you? Would you like to go? Am I importunate? But you don't think that, or perhaps you do—tell me quite frankly."

"No, no. But what has happened to you to-day? What's the matter with you?"

"Look up into the blue sky," he answered, throwing back his head. "To fly, to fly far away with you! See, there is a grave without anything on it—give me your flowers, they will look better there. You can attend to the other grave another time, not to-day, not in white clothes, please."

Elisabeth remained standing. Richard had seen a flowerless grave, a little aside from the path; and over shrubs and railings he was clambering towards it, the bunch of flowers held aloft in his right hand. Along the path the young clergyman was now approaching; he greeted Elisabeth with a deep bow and halted. She reached out her hand to him, for they

175

had already met one evening at the house of a friend and had talked about orthodox Christianity, much to their mutual satisfaction. He had formed the opinion that Elisabeth was a wideawake woman, a true child of her time. That she was wearing white in a cemetery was quite after his heart, for he found irksome his fellow-believers' remoteness from the problems of life. He preached a Christianity which did not look askance at but rested upon the world progress of science, upon sport and fashion. His colleagues had refused to officiate at the burial of the suicide, but he was ready to bury any number of them, as well as thieves, murderers and any kind of criminal. He felt it his duty never to refuse. He was convinced that Christianity was still in its infancy. It was waxing, not waning. The infant was developing into a man. Indeed, it could reach its full stature only in so far as Christ was a human being like ourselves.

He was a cheerful person, and esteemed in Lammsdorf because of his happy disposition. He took from Christianity its fearful aspect, in both

meanings of the word. Remove a mountain? Quite simple: three thousand five hundred navvies, the necessary machinery and railway equipment, carry the mountain away and dump it somewhere else.

“You look the embodiment of life,” he said to Elisabeth. “I feel dreadful in this black. We’ve just buried another suicide. Two days ago they dissected him in the local hospital. I was talking about it with the doctor in charge. They found he’d an abnormal brain. I’d like to know the history of the man’s life.”

Richard joined them, and Elisabeth tried to get away from the clergyman, whose every word was a pain to her. But despite all hints he would not budge from her side. She was obliged to introduce Richard who, now glum, seemed to have lost all his liveliness; and walking between the two men she moved at a quick pace towards the cemetery gates.

176

The clergyman talked with a profusion of technical expressions about the abnormality of the brain. Richard was not listening. To Elisabeth it was intolerable wordiness. And while she was thinking of the Recluse, of whom the clergyman chattered, Richard was thinking of Eric Zamell, whose grave he had just left, that uncared-for grave. His thoughts turned indignantly to the white-clad woman beside him, who, indifferent to the fact that her husband’s untended grave was flowerless and crossless, a neglected heap of earth except for the name-stone, had only that morning plighted her troth. He felt a desire to strike her, as he had felt that day when he had seen her crossing the market-place with averted face. Was she indeed beautiful? No, she was hateful!

He came to a standstill. Elisabeth turned to him, and the clergyman stopped chattering.

“I should like to leave you here. Please excuse me,” Richard said, stretching out his hand to Elisabeth. She took it with an air of embarrassment and surprise; she gripped it tightly, her eyes pleading with him. He wrenched his hand from her grasp and, barely acknowledging the clergyman’s presence, hurried back into the cemetery.

Elisabeth and the clergyman passed out through the cemetery gates. A taxi was waiting for the latter. He asked whether he might take her as far as her home, but she declined.

She slowly proceeded along the road leading to the town. The taxi overtook her, and she had once more to acknowledge the clergyman’s

salute. Then the taxi moved noisily away, becoming smaller and smaller down the road until it was out of sight.

Elisabeth turned round and ran, ran as fast as she could, towards the cemetery, through the gates and along the path down which the three had passed but a short time before.

177

She could see nothing of Richard. Through the length of the cemetery she hurried, looking vainly everywhere. But she would not give up the search. This way and that way she ran. Two men were shovelling earth beside a grave. She inquired of them, but they could tell her nothing. Still she remained standing by them. A thought held her, fettered her: this must be the grave she was seeking, here, covered by the earth, must be lying the man she had loved, loved in despite of Eric Zamell. The thought overpowered her. She asked the man whose grave it might be. Yes, she had guessed rightly.

Suddenly, she knew not why, she asked whether they could direct her to Eric Zamell's grave. They pointed out the way; the grave was easy to find; one of them would lead her to it.

She could feel her heart beating as she followed the man. With a start of fright she noticed that her bunch of flowers was lying on the grave. Hurriedly she gave the man a few pence, to get rid of him. Then she wept. She wept, her body sunk convulsively upon the grass and weeds that grew rankly upon the grave of Eric Zamell. At last anxiety and terror drove her to get up. It was striking seven from the cathedral tower when at length she arrived home. Frederick, consumed with impatience, was waiting for her.

She threw herself with such abandon into his arms that he was startled. Where had she been? What was the matter? He questioned her, but she could give no answer. "It's nothing," she said, "only that I haven't seen you for so long!" More he could not learn from her but he felt that she was concealing something. On the drawing-room table was a letter for her. Frederick told her of it, but she did not want to know anything about it. He persisted that she ought to open it.

178

At last she did so. It was a letter from her manager asking her to accept his resignation. The reason he offered was that he was already too old; in particular he did not feel able, at his age and in consideration of the

responsibility he had hitherto carried, to act under a new proprietor. He had, moreover, expected that she would have sought his advice in matters of such decisive importance; and it was deeply wounding to him to learn from an office employee of the change in the control of the factory.

Elisabeth read out the letter in an agitated voice; and Frederick remarked, in answer to her questioning glance, "That's William's doing."

Elisabeth defended the youth. "Perhaps he meant no harm to you. And I certainly didn't tell him that the matter was confidential."

"So you have, as a matter of fact, told him about it?" Frederick asked.

"Of course!" said Elisabeth. "It's a question for me to decide. But the manager must stay."

Then she broke once more into weeping, wept over her lies, because she didn't want to go on lying, wept over William, over herself, over everything.

Frederick thought: "She is ill, she must travel and get away from here." And when he proposed that they should go away together for a lengthy holiday, she was jubilant—her joy was exaggerated. He felt seriously concerned about her and determined to depart the next day in order to make arrangements for leave of absence. He would be back, so he calculated, within two days, and they would then set out immediately on their journey. The prospect revived her, she regained her calm.

William, who had gone out, was not yet back at dinnertime. Frederick and Elisabeth ate alone. They discussed their journey. She was all for Paris, but he preferred

179

Holland or the Lower Rhine. Elisabeth had no objection to either and said repeatedly:

"We needn't settle anything definitely to-night. In any case we will never be separated again. I mean to go with you first thing to-morrow—I want to learn something of your home-country—and your bachelor den. Did you often entertain girls?"

"Indeed no! Not a single one!" His reply pleased her.

After dinner Frederick proposed to call on the manager. He had no intention of taking over the factory—he understood absolutely nothing about it. Nor was it Elisabeth's intention. None the less she declared her insistence upon "Frederick Zurnieden, formerly Eric Zamell"; and if



Frederick dared to go out, she threatened she would go with him. He was quite willing that she should, and they set out together.

The old manager was quickly placated. He complained of William, but Elisabeth, hearing of her protégé's ingratitude, none the less defended and excused him. Frederick was touched by this, although, or rather because, he could not understand it. What a child she was, he told himself, what an innocent child—that was the cause of all her mistakes.

The manager and Frederick had very much in common, persuasiveness, integrity, straightforwardness. At the end of the late visit the old man himself proposed a change in the management of the factory. He pointed out that any day he might have to give up his work. Someone in control was a necessity—no one could be better than Frau Zamell, but she, when all was said, remained a woman. Why should not Frederick acquire the undertaking?

"There is no question of my buying it," Frederick Zurnieden answered frankly. Then he was silent, waiting for Elisabeth to tell the old man of their betrothal. But as she

180

too remained silent, he felt himself obliged to announce the event. The shadow had fallen upon him once more, that heavy shadow. His words, he felt, sounded as though he were making an excuse when he confessed that they had just become engaged, which fact might well account for the stupid gossip about a change in the ownership of the factory.

While Frederick spoke of the betrothal, Elisabeth's face was closely scrutinized by the eyes of the old man, whose nature was direct and simple. This was no bride, he thought, at least not a happy bride. But he rose to his feet and stepping ceremoniously towards her offered his congratulations:

"I rejoice with my whole heart, dear Frau Zamell. It is excellent, truly excellent."

Frederick Zurnieden had favourably impressed the manager, and the latter was too good a judge of men not to recognize the honesty and integrity of the man before him, a man who would be able to influence this restless woman for her good.

He said to Frederick:

"It will be a real pleasure for me to work with you. I would most gladly initiate you this very night into the working of the whole undertaking."

Almost reproachfully Elisabeth now said to Frederick: "Now, you see, everybody thinks as I do!"

Frederick's reply was to speak of the proposed journey, which, he admitted frankly, was meant for the benefit of Elisabeth's health. Once more the manager's eyes searched her face.

She felt uncomfortable before his gaze and was preparing to leave when the manager's wife, a white-haired, homely woman in a long skirt, came into the room to greet the guests and offer them a little wine.

There could now be no question of immediate departure.

181

Elisabeth was bored while Frederick was soothed by the company. How simple, sincere and good-hearted the old couple were! The big round table, the old-fashioned lamp hanging above it, the whole room—how serene, how solid and comfortable everything seemed!

The old lady with her honest, kindly face, how pleasantly she talked to Elisabeth! But the latter was off-hand, restless and unresponsive. Frederick thought of the animation and charm with which she had chattered in Richard Tommsen's company. Here she seemed to be entirely bored.

The old manager continued to gaze questioningly at Elisabeth's face. A bride-to-be? Did she really look like one? For the past ten minutes he had been fingering his glass in hesitation, for he knew that he must drink to the health of the engaged couple and the toast could no longer be put off. But he must first tell his wife of the betrothal, for she was still in ignorance of it. She would, he knew, be astonished, vastly astonished, and might in her plain-speaking simplicity ask questions which would offend either one or other of them. That had to be avoided and so he decided to leave the toast unhonoured.

It was an immense relief to both host and guests when after half an hour this uncomfortable visit came to an end. Elisabeth bade the old pair a friendly, even warm-hearted, good night.

Arm-in-arm and with leisurely pace Frederick and Elisabeth passed in silence through the quiet streets, each sunk in thought.

So she was really engaged, thought Elisabeth, and her feelings rebelled as against compulsion. But she wanted to marry him, she had willed it, even now she willed it, and yet since Frederick had expressed, as with underlined words, the fact of her now fulfilled wish, there was something in her that rose against the frowning aspect of hard fact. She

knew what it was that caused this feeling of resistance—it was Richard. And she questioned herself, as she clung to Frederick’s arm, whether she in fact loved him. How severely, how reproachfully, Richard’s eyes had scanned her when suddenly and unexpectedly he had left her at the cemetery! He had torn himself from her, disregarding the pressure of her hand that sought to detain him. Where was he now, she asked, where? She could not shake off the impressions of that afternoon at the cemetery. Richard had taken firm occupation of her thoughts, he tortured her with the sense of her obligations. But why—why?

Frederick was conscious of her abstraction and of that shadow which had lain over him during all these hours of sociability. He felt Elisabeth’s arm and pressed it closely against him. As he held it he was holding her too; yet she was no nearer to him but receding farther and farther away. It was that shadow again—that shadow—what a silly description, he thought, for what he was feeling! But the expression somehow suited. “That shadow again” was good. Merely “again” was still shorter, still more intense. Yes, the phrase would do. There had been another time when a phrase had been so utterly right. Ah, he remembered—it was when Eric Zamell had died.

He could not repress a start, an involuntary shudder that went through his whole body. Elisabeth noticed it and asked:

“What’s the matter?”

“Nothing. There’s nothing the matter with me, Elisabeth.”

But he was startled by that memory of “the man who was brushing his clothes as though in preparation for a long journey.” Yes, that was a description as utterly right as “that shadow again.”

“We’ll set out early to-morrow,” Frederick said. He

said it in an effort to strike that shadow dead. “Elisabeth,” he called, and when she did not reply immediately, cried: “Where are you? Answer me, I beg you.”

She answered truthfully:

“Holding your arm, Frederick.”

## CHAPTER XXVIII

**F**REDERICK was dreaming: You see, Herr Zurnieden, divided personality ... you don't understand what it is?" A man, entirely clothed in black, sat beside Frederick's bed and talked to him;

"It's really quite simple. I am alone. I am usually alone, usually sitting in my bedroom. You know the place, for you've visited me there—that gloomy hole at Frau Krafft's, 24 Langenstrasse, third floor—you know, just opposite the barber Weitner. As I said, I'm usually sitting in my room. And then I think of your future wife, while I'm sitting in my room. You'll have a beautiful bride—you know it. I know it too. And it's been quite clear to you for a long time, that I'm in love with her—indeed, terribly in love—I simply can't go on without her. Consequently, since you are in my way and want to prevent my visiting her, I must resort to dividing my personality. Just consider: I am poor, without a penny to bless myself with. None the less I mean to live. You understand, I want to live. And I'm going to live, in spite of your relationship with Frau Zamell. With Frau Zamell!—there's something too formal about the sound—for simplicity's sake let us rather say 'Elisabeth'—let us call her by the name with which she was christened. As I just said, I've got no money, am up to my eyes in debt, none the less ... that's why I do nothing in the matter. To do anything means spending money. So I do nothing, because I've no money. You on the other hand are sacrificing the few pounds you've got. The main question, after all, concerns Elisabeth herself. Now, she has a handsome income, heaps of money. She possesses two men,

185

while each of us has only this one woman; yet neither of us has her entirely for we share her between us. Please don't misunderstand me—this isn't a question of a joint intimacy. I'm not contending for Elisabeth, nor are you. Elisabeth has a claim on you—and on me too. There's no need to talk of rivalry between us—that's an out-of-date way of looking at it. Men have fallen in value: let us frankly confess between ourselves that we no longer count. At one time a man was worth as much as, even more than, two to-day. That Elisabeth is a little unsatisfied with even two of them must be admitted, but we needn't exactly tell her so. The thing for us to do is to

keep a third man away from her, to throw dust in her eyes. As to our two-sided arrangement, Herr Zurnieden, we don't need to be suspicious—it's quite the fashionable thing with the modern woman. We must share Elisabeth between us—sharing is a purely masculine affair, it corresponds to the true situation between the sexes. That's between ourselves of course—but hush, she mustn't hear it. The situation is awry, suspiciously awry ... the modern woman is a most surprising creature from the standpoint of nature ... she spoils herself, her best qualities go absolutely to the dogs—but we needn't disturb ourselves about that—we've lost our heads a little bit. Of course there are limits ... certain limits ... it's obvious—to bear children is worth more than begetting them. At the same time the supremacy of the female has its limits—it's not always easy to hold the scales evenly. It's for us to maintain a certain independence, a modification of Eric Zamell's demands—just like Wilson's 'Fourteen Points,' you know—to which we must adjust ourselves. Naturally this is quite a different question—different people, different minds. Therefore we've got to come to an agreement about this sharing—at least it has to be a complete sharing—all cut and dried, as people say. For my part I'd like to make

186

a proposal to you: I'll claim Elisabeth's body and soul—you can take possession of her heart and mind ...”

Frederick was awakened by his own shouts. Dripping with perspiration, his heart hammering, he started up in bed. He had shouted to the black-clothed man to take himself off to the devil.

It was a warm, still night. The scent of flowers floated in through the open window of his bedroom. Everything was quiet. It had all been a dream—fortunately not a reality. His heart began to calm itself, soon it would be beating quite peacefully. Yet he still sat upright in bed. His senses were still in a state of tension; he listened to the night about him. Then he heard the melancholy whistle of a locomotive, and, listening intently, distinguished the sound of a train which passed through Lammsdorf and rolled down the valley in the flower-scented night. It was just like the night that followed Eric's funeral, when, plagued by dreams, he could no longer sleep. A thought returned again and again—ah, what a martyrdom! His heart beat faster. Like fire the blood pulsed in his head. He wanted to cry out, to pummel himself, to make a noise. But he was a man of reason: he forced himself to be calm. He had learned self-control, both as a soldier and in his

life as an official. Throughout his whole life it had been always selfcontrol. So he fell asleep once more, until he was awakened, about four in the morning, by Elisabeth's cries.

. . . . .

Two hours before midnight Richard returned to his lodging. Frau Krafft was still up and, pushing her head round the kitchen door, remarked:

"You've got your money, Herr Tommsen."

Richard did not understand. His thoughts had been far away with Elisabeth during the hours since he had left her

187

at the cemetery. In the darkness he groped for the door of his room, mechanically, as though from long habit.

Frau Krafft spoke again:

"The money has come for you."

Now he heard her and understood. The bank must have made a mistake. To-morrow or the next day a telegram would arrive, pointing out the error: "With a request for the immediate return of the money inadvertently overpaid." It had happened to him once before. Deuce take those bank clerks who made mistakes just in order to fool him! But it was a good thing there had been a mistake—good for Frau Krafft at any rate.

"So it has come at last!" he exclaimed.

"Would you like a cup of coffee?" Frau Krafft inquired.

Richard stood still. He had eaten nothing for five days. Twice a day he had drunk water from the drinking fountain in the market-place. Water was healthy enough.

"I can cut you some bread-and-butter in a moment," he heard his landlady saying.

"Oh no, thank you, I think not," he answered. "It is really very kind of you, but ..."

"You ought to know I'm only too glad," the old woman growled.

By this time he had found his door and entered his room. Through the open window drifted in the sound of a duet from Weitner's first floor opposite—a simple tune learned by heart and strummed upon the keys after being practised three hundred times with relentless persistence. There was a party going on—Fraulein Weitner had invited some former school friends. After the duet dancing began, and Richard watched the shadows as they

passed across the window curtains. But the dancing seemed laboured, there was no swing about the music. Then someone's name was shouted, most likely some youngster's who could rattle off a Charleston or the latest

188

one-step. Ah, now they were off again, with shouts of "bravo" and clapping of hands. Richard pulled a chair to the window, sat down and stretched himself out as much as he could—that was the best way of resisting the pangs of hunger.

For a starving man the first few days are the worst; from the fourth or fifth the craving for food becomes less—it is all a question of getting accustomed to it. After the fourth week begin those ridiculous imaginings about foods, menus, kitchen odours, restaurants, arrangements of different dishes, *hors-d'œuvres* and joints, according to the condition and particular circumstances of the starving man. One man imagines himself eating in the street, another in the cellar, a third in his room, a fourth beside the Rhine where he can see the river flowing as night comes on, with moonlight, music and wine. Indeed, it all depends upon the starving man's condition, and one delusion is as good as another.

Stars shone in a slightly clouded sky—it had been like that a year before. Frau Krafft was still in the kitchen. Richard wondered whether she would bring him something, in spite of his refusal, and whether she had noted that for weeks he had eaten nothing except the breakfast she provided for him. For the last five days he had not taken even breakfast. "How they do keep on dancing over there!" he thought. "Miss Shingled-head is having a celebration. Frau Krafft is making a noise with the kitchen things.... I believe ... I'm afraid not ... but I hope ... poor creature, she thinks she's going to get her rent to-morrow morning. Ah, if she only knew, if she only guessed.... I shall have to refuse that coffee. But I do wish I had a cigarette—just one—even half a one would do. I can't understand how I could ever have thrown half a cigarette away when I had money. This cursed poverty! There's the moon again. How its reappearance can disturb one! Everything conspires to make the night lovely. I think I'll

189

go out again—I can't bear it in this room. Disturbance everywhere! They're dancing, throwing up their legs. Everything has legs—legs everywhere. Every illustrated paper is full of legs. Jensen in Lübeck used to talk of the

cult of legs: we haven't got much else, but we've plenty of them. A noddle and two legs—that's the modern woman. Elisabeth ... but she's different. How I wish Frau Krafft would go off to bed, so there'd be peace in the room! I'm annoyed with that stupid bank in Hamburg—they oughtn't to have sent that money. I'm not a man who can keep money until a telegram asks for it back. My funds are exhausted—six weeks ago they sent me a hundred marks too much, and three days later a wire came, 'Please be so good as to send back immediately ...' I sent it—I had the lucre still by me. But this time I have nothing."

Richard sprang out of bed and stepped to the window. He was not at all tired and meant to go down immediately to the street.

"Perhaps," he thought, "they found they'd made a mistake in thinking they'd made a mistake that time. Of course, that must be it. They're sending the hundred marks back to me—and this time I'll keep it. If they've made a second mistake, that's their own stupidity."

"Come in," he said as Frau Krafft knocked a second time on tile door. "Come in." She entered with coffee and two pieces of bread and butter.

"In case you should be hungry in the night," she explained. "But aren't you going to bed yet?"

"Money," thought Richard, "it's the money she's after—she lets me go hungry for five days, and now she brings me coffee and food in the night. Money, money—that's everything!"

"So the money has come at last?" he asked, still standing by the window and peering down into the street.

190

"Yes, by telegram," said Frau Krafft. "A thousand marks. A good thing too, for you didn't receive anything last month."

Richard did not turn round. "The old woman must be crazy," he thought, "or perhaps I am crazy."

"Do you really mean to go away the day after tomorrow?" Frau Krafft inquired as she placed the cup and plate on the table.

He turned and faced her. "Well, really, I had almost forgotten that! Yes, the day after to-morrow I'm off. Fraulein Weitner has had her hair shingled. I wonder whether her father cut it for her. What do you think, Frau Krafft?"

"And won't you be coming back again to Lammsdorf?"

"No, never again. Italy next, I'd prefer. Your brother-in-law lives there, doesn't he?"



“Yes, yes ... but I do think it’s a pity you should ....”

She hesitated. What she meant was that it was a pity he should go just when he had money again.

Richard spoke, with a tone of complaint in his falling voice: “Yes, when a thing becomes beautiful, then it finishes ... but tell me, didn’t you say it was a thousand marks?”

“Yes indeed! The post-office messenger wouldn’t leave it with me.”

Everything must have indeed gone crazy! Richard exclaimed in a tone of annoyance:

“But the fellow ought to have sent me two thousand marks! You know, the bank manager in Hamburg must be a perfect ass. I’m sure the fellow must be in love—one could never be so stupid otherwise.”

Frau Krafft laughed with one side of her face—the other side looked ready to weep. She still stood in the doorway and said sadly:

“And now you are going away?”

Richard suppressed his laughter. He found this conversation somewhat amusing.

191

“Come, come, Frau Krafft, there are many other lodgers who are just as trustworthy as I.”

“Yes,” she answered, “that’s true enough. I didn’t mean to say that there weren’t, but one never knows when one of them will come along! Good night!”

“Good night, Frau Krafft. It really wasn’t necessary for you to bring me this coffee.”

What was the old lady saying?

“Ah well,” she said, either from long habit or from extreme obligingness, “I feel quite sure of you.” Then she disappeared and the door shut behind her. The moonlight was streaming over the housetops while Richard thought of Elisabeth. On the table the coffee and bread-and-butter were waiting for him.

A thousand marks? Must be a mistake, a criminal mistake, the more serious as one thought about it. A thousand, a one and three noughts. A four-figure mistake—a four-figure crime. If the bank people in Hamburg became quite crazy, he might yet become the owner of the Zamell soap factory. But the old woman must be crazy. However—coffee, bread-and-butter.

Richard slunk over to the table, drank and ate very quietly, so that no one should hear. He decided to leave a little coffee in the cup, and a bit of bread: the old dame must not notice that he was so hungry.

He wasn't eating—one could hardly call it that—he was gobbling the food, all the while thinking of Elisabeth and feeling a deep melancholy.

Suddenly he stopped. His glance was held, as though bewitched, by something that lay beside the coffee pot. There could be no doubt about it, he was crazy, absolutely crazy, dreaming. He pinched his leg. No, he was not dreaming. It was all actual: there beside the coffee pot lay a cigarette.

192

What a kind-hearted woman she was, he thought feelingly. He walked to the window with the cigarette. He had not put on the light, for the night was bright enough with the moon and the street lamps. He held the cigarette up to the light. It was his old brand, the sort he had smoked for years. He laughed, thinking how she must have stolen it while he still had boxes full. All the same, she was a kind-hearted woman. But probably she had not remembered the matches. Or had she? Yes—she must have known that he was entirely without money, must have known that he had had nothing to eat. In that case he would eat everything, drink every drop. By Jove, there was a box of matches too, and a second cigarette.

“Thank you, Frau Krafft”—he said to himself—“thank you for stealing my cigarettes! Now everything is right again! Now I won't go away—never! But the thousand marks? O blue sky, O stars wandering high over us above the mists! O moon, guardian of the night! Lovely moon, Lammsdorf moon, Langenstrasse moon, moon that shines upon Frau Krafft! A thousand marks? No, no—the old woman must have a money-complex, and I too. We've only to see a postman down there in the street for both of us to go mad—ten marks jumps to a hundred, a hundred is at once a thousand. The bank in Hamburg pays it all. She's quite sure of me, she says, when she sees the postman. If the money doesn't come, the postman must have absconded with it, say I. The bank must have sent it, whatever may have happened! ‘Come, come,’ she'll croak, ‘I'm quite sure of you.’”

“That's an unpleasant expression, ‘I'm sure of you.’ Tatarata tatarata ... they're having a high old time over at Weitner's place. Twenty-one lambs, eleven goats, ten sheep. That just fits in. Number eleven must be strumming. Lammsdorf is a nigger village. Germany too, all Europe, the whole world. Elisabeth—Elisabeth as a bride

—all in white. How the idea distresses me! Now the moon is shining upon the grave. Unworthy memorial! A marble stone! To-day betrothed! On the anniversary of the death—no, of the burial—of him who felt just as I do—only from the other side. Oh, the stars! How pale! Tatarata tatarata ... no, you stars, no,—I cannot renounce it—I have staked everything on this card. Angelica was the prologue: Elisabeth is the drama! Frau Krafft, your second cigarette. Tatarata tatarata.... Let me just get hold of Elisabeth ... now I've got her! ... What do you want, Herr Zurnieden? Oh, the stars! Tatarata ... haha! Epilogue: the bank in Hamburg. 'Requesting the immediate return of the money inadvertently overpaid.' Nonsense, gentlemen, nonsense. What do you want? The old thrush is singing in the hall—listen to her—'He lodges in my house, but the furniture belongs to me.' Tatarata ... ha, ha, ha! ... A shooting-star over Weitner's. What splendour up there! It flies through space, a shattered, ruined star—the fragments whistle through the ether like mad things. Stones—perhaps metal, gold, silver—who knows? Tatarata—the music has stopped. Now they'll have the wine, spiced wine. O sky, O night! Why do I deceive myself so? Perhaps she hasn't promised to marry him. It won't do, it mustn't happen. I am afire when I see her, and consumed if I don't see her. I must go to her—I must. I can't exist without her—nor will I. It was stupid of me to leave her—childish! It was rudeness for rudeness. And why? Oh, if ... a thousand marks? Look, they're waltzing! Is it possible? Are the hairs growing, Weitner? Elisabeth, Elisabeth, I must come to you. I am coming, your Schabeu. 'Fly, fly.' Jensen, Jensen, how you laughed over that! It was all humbug, you said. 'That is reality,' you said, pointing to a Swedish sailing-ship, 'have a good look at it.' Good—I looked and saw—I can still see it—a light on the

forward mast ... the captain had died during the voyage. It was in the Travemünde paper—I read about it later, but Jensen had gone away. Ah, there's the tatarata again. Da capo, da capo! If only she could see the stars I But she's got to keep going. Fraulein Weitner is light-headed. How she rolls about to the nigger time that's called rhythm nowadays. May-flies! But if the bank ... that the bank in Hamburg by a mistake ... it wasn't my doing, Frau Krafft. You forced the coffee on me, just as Elisabeth has been forced

into her engagement. It mustn't be permitted—I won't tolerate it. I wonder, is it making her suffer? What then does she want with me? Does she not hold me? Did she not want to hold fast to my hand? I felt it was so. But I must know what's happening now. I will go to her, I will try to reach her. I have never tried to do that—it has happened involuntarily, unintentionally. I myself am very annoyed by these visits, Herr Zurnieden, I assure you—I am very annoyed. They happen without any intention on my part but from a compulsion within me which I cannot explain. Quite unaccountable to me. But now, since you are willing to share her ... getting married ... that will never do, really it won't! Tatarata tatarata ... it's indeed a rhythm, but what a one! Listening to the sound of this music, with eyes fixed upon the moon's disc ... and with a thousand marks in the post—or in the brain of that good she-goat Krafft—she is and remains a she-goat, with her confidence in the miserable thousand marks. Ah, Elisabeth Zamell, the drawing-room is on the right—no light there. The second door must be her bedroom, without a doubt, I know it. Moon, you are the door! Moon, guardian of the night, you are the door! Look, you are this door! Tatarata tatarata ... that damn silly music!"

Richard's thoughts whirled madly round and round—money, Krafft, Weitner, Elisabeth. He could not force

195

them into coherency. It was not quite four o'clock when he fell into a sleep of exhaustion on the sofa by the window. But he did not dream. He slept peacefully, softly, a sleep of refreshment.

Elisabeth's cries, which woke Frederick from his sleep, had quite a different cause.

Frederick had taken her to her bedroom. She was tired, or pretended to be, and let him lead her to her bed. She sank down. She kissed him and fell asleep. But she awoke and found she was still dressed. Feeling chilly, she rose and was astonished to see the time when she glanced at her watch upon the bedside table. She undressed and, pulling back the bed clothes, suddenly shook and shouted with terror. From the empty bed, in which Eric Zamell and later her little son had slept, stretched the hairy, closed hand of a man, the fingers clutching at the sheet. A piece of paper, written on, lay near, but she did not see it, for suddenly she saw nothing more and with a shriek fell to the floor.

It was this cry that had roused Frederick. She flung herself into his arms. She could not speak in answer to his questions; she could only force him back to his bedroom, still clinging to him, and then bolt the door behind them.

At last she told him of her fright. He examined the hand; it was artificial, a very good imitation made of wood and plaster. Upon the piece of paper was written: "I warn you."

Frederick hurried to William's bed, beside himself with anger. At the sight of the youth, who gave him a look of hatred and sat up as though just roused from deep sleep, Frederick lost his self-control and without a word of explanation gave William a resounding smack on the face. Then he waited for retaliation, ready to beat him to a jelly. But William did not move, only his eyes burned with hate against his enemy.

196

Frederick was so surprised by William's lack of spirit that he was almost embarrassed. There was a pause and then his anger found vent in a storm of words. The youth, his eyes blazing with hate, listened without moving a muscle, without answering a word. Elisabeth rushed into the room, alarmed by the sound of Frederick's voice, and flung herself between them.

"Please be quiet," she said to Frederick; and to William: "Don't look at him in that terrible way. What have you done, William? Tell me."

Then occurred the unaccountable thing before which Frederick retreated. Elisabeth caressed the face of the unmannerly boy, and the boy wept.

It was late that night before Frau Krafft fell asleep. Quite twenty times she had read over the letter from which she had learned of Elisabeth's intention to make her a present of the last two months' rent. "I have already heard from Herr Tommsen himself"—Elisabeth had written—"that his indebtedness to you has put you in the awkward situation of which you have informed me. I can quite understand that, and you need not distress yourself about it as I am making you a present of the rent you owe me. But I do not wish you to mention the matter to Herr Tommsen or to anybody else, please—I should not like that at all. The money for which he has been kept waiting will doubtless arrive within a few days, and you need only be patient, dear Frau Krafft."

Richard had never spoken to Elisabeth about his financial difficulties nor told her that his rent was unpaid. Was it pure imagination that had driven

her to this distortion of the truth? Was it her kindness of heart? Or was it due to a weakness, a feeling of fear, in the face of life as she found it? The letter had put Frau Krafft in a dilemma, for within an hour of its arrival her lodger had received,

197

as in a fairy tale, the long-delayed remittance of money,—at least it was in the post. If therefore Richard now paid his rent, was Frau Krafft entitled to benefit by Elisabeth's generosity? She could indeed do with the money, for there was to be a ball in Lammsdorf to which she wanted to go.

Teased by the problem, she tossed about in her bed. It was a pleasant life and when one had money to spare a thousand times pleasanter! Not till the early hours of the morning did she cease to be plagued by this problem; for, at the same time, there mounted within her an anxiety lest her room might remain for a couple of months lodgerless after Richard's departure. So intolerable became this anxiety that she was driven to decide, as a means of defending herself against it, that Richard Tommsen must discharge his debt to her. Clearly she had waited long enough and, equally clearly, the money was due to her, since the money from the payment of which Elisabeth had excused her was a gift—that was stated in the letter. Besides, she could not get away from the risk of having the room empty for a couple of months. And she would tell Herr Tommsen, if he made any difficulties, that he must please understand it was a matter of business. She thought out the wording of a postcard which she would send at the cost of one penny, running something like this: "Dear Frau Zamell, am very pleased about your kindness in letting me off my rent, and want to thank you for same. Unfortunately our lodger is going off and leaving the town, so I am still very worried. I remain, Yours respectfully, Freda Krafft."

She heard the first tram going to the railway station. Then calm came to her troubled mind and she fell asleep. Peace possessed the Langenstrasse, even at Weitner's everything was now quiet. But it had been a jolly party. Tatarata tatarata....

198

## CHAPTER XXIX

THE next morning Frederick Zurnieden left by the express. Elisabeth accompanied him to the station. As the tram carried them past number 24 Langenstrasse she did not look up at the house. And why? She was going to pay Richard a visit as soon as her fiancé would have gone away—that was her settled intention. Frederick left with a heavy heart: it seemed impossible for a candid talk to take place between him and Elisabeth.

At breakfast that morning he had taken things with energy into his own hands: he had put William out of the house, bag and baggage. Elisabeth had agreed, after long discussion, to this determined course, behind which stood Frederick's threat: "He or I must go." Moreover, that morning's post had brought her a letter from the manager, wherein he demanded pressingly the youth's immediate dismissal. The long and detailed explanation of this demand convinced her that her protégé had for days past been spreading through Lammsdorf the wildest and most perverse stories about her. At first she had given way to unrestrained tears, but, comforting herself very soon, she had refrained from blaming the young scamp, had even defended him, with embarrassment admittedly, but none the less she had defended him.

In the haste and excitement of these happenings Frederick had had little time for pondering Elisabeth's behaviour. He was prone, moreover, to attribute all her faults to a goodness of heart which was not to be questioned. When in the grey dawn he had escaped from that almost incredible scene with William, Elisabeth had come to his room and a heated argument had taken place between them. It ended with her

199

agreeing to his determination that, before his own departure, William must be driven out of the house. And so it happened.

Frederick intended to return as early as possible on the following day.

"Come back quickly," Elisabeth said as they waited on the platform.

"Yes, I'll come back as soon as I can," he answered. "But don't let Herr Tommsen visit you while I'm away, please. You must spare your nerves. You know I'm very worried about you, Elisabeth."

"Come back soon," she called. It sounded so sincere, so importunate, as if it were a cry for protection. Her words moved him deeply.

“Let the maid sleep in the nursery,” he suggested, “and have the child with you for the night.”

The engine whistled outside the station—the signal was against it. Elisabeth pressed herself to Frederick and, as she saw a man she knew standing on the opposite platform, she exclaimed:

“I want him to see quite clearly that I belong to you!”

Frederick pressed her arm. Elisabeth was thinking: “I’ll go straight back home, I won’t visit Richard Tommsen, I won’t visit him!”

At the same moment Frau Krafft came into Richard’s bedroom.

“The man from the post-office is here, Herr Tommsen. Shall he come into your room?”

“But I haven’t got any money!” Richard exclaimed in sudden fright. “What does he want with me?”

He heard the old woman speaking in the hall. He composed his thoughts and opened the door. After all, he wasn’t able to prevent it—he could only laugh, just laugh.

200

Still laughing, he took the telegram and read it: “Thousand marks kindest regards excuse delay digger.”

Digger? Who was Digger? Where did this Digger live? The telegram came from Lammsdorf, handed in the day before at four twenty-three, arrived at ... the figures were indistinct. What was one to make of it? From Lammsdorf? Not from the bank at Hamburg after all. Like fire a thought burned through his head and heart: Elisabeth! It must have been Elisabeth! But that couldn’t have been the explanation. No, no!

“Would you like breakfast now?” Frau Krafft called twice.

“You can’t be sure of me,” Richard shouted back.

“Come, come,” the old woman answered. “A thousand marks, that doesn’t happen every day.” And she began to grind the coffee.

“I can’t take the money”—Richard was thinking—“such a thing is out of the question. No, no, you don’t understand me, Elisabeth. No, not in any circumstances. Digger? Who is Digger? Or might it be this Zurnieden? If so, he’s got a cheek—he doesn’t know Tommy Schabeu.”

Richard washed and dressed. Frau Krafft knocked on the door and asked whether he would have a roll with his coffee.



The money must have turned her head quite crazy, he thought, and replied: "Not necessary at all."

But the old woman persisted: "I'll go out and fetch you something—I shan't be long. Just answer the door in case anyone comes."

"Very well!" Richard shouted. Let the devil come!—he thought. Perhaps Digger would come, saying: "I beg your pardon, but there's been an unfortunate mistake."

The old woman went out. Richard laughed till he shook and began imitating her voice.

201

"Come now, I'm quite sure of you, indeed I am." Still laughing he added: "What is sure is that you'll get nothing from me, you old she-goat! Digger be damned, dead and damned! He's a devil, a satan! Digger's an ass, a camel, a swine, a beast! He's a ..."

The door-bell rang and Richard laughed.

"Just answer the door in case anyone comes! Digger comes—the swine is here already. I could claim a reward from him. But I don't want money ... I only want ..."—the door-bell sounded again—"... to box Digger's ears!"

He went to open the door. His knees trembled. On the doorstep stood Elisabeth. Her knees were trembling too, and she clung to the railing.

They both laughed. She stretched out her hand to him; he took it and stuttered:

"My landlady's out. Everyone is mad here. Do you know Digger?"

She burst out laughing. She knew the fascination of her laugh: it was infectious.

"Do you really mean to leave me standing on the doorstep?" she asked.

"No, of course I don't," Richard returned with a smile. "We can go out at once—this very moment—I am ready."

"Have you then already had breakfast? ... I don't believe it," Elisabeth cried as Richard nodded. "Frau Krafft must be out fetching the rolls."

So it wasn't all a dream, Richard told himself, and he stood aside for Elisabeth to enter the house. She went into his room without hesitation, as though she were quite at home in the place. And Richard recalled that the house indeed belonged to her.

Frau Krafft could be heard coming up the steps. The kettle was boiling on the gas-ring in the kitchen. Richard followed Elisabeth into the room

and closed the door.

202

“You seem to be a wealthy man,” she said laughing, for on the table lay a pile of notes—hundred,—fifty,—twenty,—ten—and even two-mark notes which the postal official, probably in anticipation of a tip, had brought along.

“We’ve all gone crazy,” Richard answered. “We’ve all got diggeritis.”

“How delightful!” Elisabeth exclaimed.

Frau Krafft was moving about in the house. She knocked on Richard’s door. He opened it.

There on the table lay the money. Frau Zamell must already have seen it, and the landlady’s postcard, without a word about repayment, had just been posted. Everything was spoiled!

“I’ll bring the coffee in a moment,” said Frau Krafft as she retreated.

Richard straightened himself and with sudden earnestness pointed at the money:

“Is that your doing, Frau Zamell?”

With a playful air Elisabeth dropped on to the couch which stood beside the window.

“Didn’t you say something about Digger?” she said with a smile.

Richard was taken-in by this question.

“Yes, do you know him? Who is he?”

“Digger? Don’t you know?” Elisabeth exclaimed. “Can’t you speak English?”

“Yes, but who is he?” Richard asked impatiently.

“I am he,” Elisabeth answered quietly, almost timidly.

“That will never do,” Richard said. “I can’t allow such a thing ... it’s absolutely impossible. ... I’d rather ...”

Elisabeth interrupted him:

“Throw the stuff out of the window then. It shan’t disturb us. Or hide the heap of notes. I haven’t earned the

203

money, not in the least. I live in idleness. How do I come by the money? Certainly not by earning it. What do I do for it? So let this be my first good deed. I don’t want to gain by it, but it may make you a little more comfortable. I happened to find out that you ...” She hesitated.

"I'm not starving," Richard said wanly.

"Then I am going to starve. Splendid!" she cried.

"I'm fasting," Richard added.

"Splendid! Then I'll fast too!"

Richard bit his lip, and Elisabeth, springing up, crossed over to him. She stood beside the table and said quietly, almost inaudibly:

"Have I offended you?"

"Yes," Richard replied, and repeated more distinctly, "Yes."

Frau Krafft knocked on the door, she had come with coffee and rolls—two cups and four rolls.

"I won't allow it to offend you," Elisabeth said as she took Richard's hand. "Come, let us sit down."

Frau Krafft brought in the breakfast; her hands trembled as she gathered up the notes and placed them on the table beside the bed. The world was stranger than ever, she thought. Before the War ...

"I hope you've a good appetite," she murmured. Then she stood still in the doorway. She could not rid herself of a secret fear as she saw the pile of notes which her fingers had just been touching. She had to speak and, still standing in the doorway, she asked:

"That heap of money—it doesn't mean a new inflation, does it?"

Elisabeth could not keep from laughing. Richard seemed not to have heard, or perhaps he was slower in catching the meaning, for he too laughed a few moments later. Frau Krafft disappeared, shaking her head; in the kitchen she

thought gloomily about the stabilisation of the reichsmark. She could hear the sound of conversation without being able to distinguish the words. And it was a good thing that she did not understand.

"My fiancé has gone away," Elisabeth said, "but he will be back tomorrow. I know you've got a bad opinion of me. You are right. I am not faithful, but I want to be faithful. I mean to become so. Certainly I oughtn't to be here with you—but I'm not ashamed of being here. You will be ashamed of me when I tell you that I promised my fiancé that I would refuse to see you if you called. I am false to my fiancé. I neglect my child and my home. I am a bad woman. You have every reason for despising me. You did so yesterday—beside my husband's grave. I have been there since. Yesterday was the first time that I'd visited it, and then not purposely. I was

really looking for you. Listen, I ran after you. Need I tell any further reasons why you should despise me?"

Richard remained silent, and Elisabeth continued:

"Don't you despise me too, just because I'm telling you this? Of course you do—you must. I'm not only despicable—I'm ill-bred. Your eyes plead for honour, for your own honour; and you don't even believe that what I am saying is honest—you think I'm just acting. My husband killed himself. Unhappiness—because he was unhappy with me—drove him to despair. And that indeed was your own experience four years ago. Did my infidelity send my husband to his doom? Let me tell you what I think: I'm going downhill irrevocably. One sin brings another after it, like an endless chain. Now I am here with you, force myself on you. You are ashamed of me, you despise me with all your heart, me the penitent who, out in the street once more, will immediately ogle every man I see."

"You won't do that, Frau Zamell," Richard interrupted.

205

"Indeed, that is what I shall do. I must, I can't help myself," she exclaimed. "I should stifle without this folly. In the night I am sad to think that it is so. Sometimes I feel regret, terrible, maddening regret, but not for long. Always something intervenes and then regret seems nonsense. I'm glad of that, for I am frivolous and thoughtless. I have led William astray, perhaps even ruined him. I didn't intend it, but it just happened of itself. The stream simply sweeps me on—still sweeps me on. My fiancé thinks that my nerves are all to pieces—I leave him to his delusion. The truth is, something quite other has gone to pieces—but he doesn't suspect that, and I don't enlighten him. Consequently he fails to notice a thousand things from which I cannot free myself. There are so many things like that. For example, I should die if I had no money. That's why I can't understand you, can't understand your refusing to take the money. You oughtn't, however, to think ill of my fiancé. He's an honourable, splendid man, and deserves a good wife. But I am only making him unhappy. He feels it now. Already he has a premonition of what the future will be, if I keep my promise to marry him. If ... but I mean to keep it, although I can't bear to think of it. It all depends upon you—it's in your hands. Otherwise it will come to no good, there will be a dreadful end to it. Why don't you answer me?"

"Go on, Frau Zamell, go on!"

Elisabeth blushed, only for a moment, and then continued:

“My fiancé complains—no, he doesn’t complain, but he suffers because there is a gulf between us, because I hold my soul back from him. Do you understand? I can’t bear the word soul. I simply can’t tolerate it. Probably that’s stupid of me, but the word is so very presumptuous. I haven’t got a soul—at any rate there’s no sign of it. And I think it horrible that other people want to have souls.

206

Certainly they flatter themselves by laying claim to them. I have always lived without responsibility. I’ll admit that I have been sad, even worried—one thing might be a bother, another an anxiety—but when a thing’s done with it’s done with. With people who’ve got souls it’s bound to be otherwise. My husband ... he could never forget. Things from years before went on living in him. Is that soul? I hen save me from it—then I’m glad I haven’t got a trace of it. My first husband—Eric was my second ... are you surprised? ... didn’t you know? It is shocking, but I often think that people will soon get married much more often, perhaps a dozen times. The laws will be altered. A sign will have to be worn upon the head to distinguish the chaste women. That often frightens me—I think it would be unbearable, like being buffeted by a storm. But...” Suddenly she hesitated. “But let’s have breakfast now. I’ve always wanted to have breakfast with you. Let’s sit down and behave as though nothing had happened. I can do that—I’ve had to get used to it. All change is pleasant. Just think, I’ve got to the state when I can get a peculiar pleasure out of every trifle. I can laugh when I want to cry. Aren’t you going to offer me a chair? Have I to remain standing? Oh no, do let’s sit down together. I’ll pour. Do you take sugar? It was kind of Frau Krafft to prepare this for us. Ah, how glad I am that my fiancé is away. Isn’t it glorious weather? What shall we do to-day? I’ve a request: that you lunch with me to-day. Now don’t refuse me that. We’ll be contented and merry. I should like to hear some music. Formerly I used to play a lot, mostly during the years before Eric’s death. Were you really so upset with me about Eric’s grave? Yet there was a good reason for that: my wickedness. I really did love Eric. But he changed after our marriage—he became pettier and pettier. Latterly he had indeed lost something of his petty

207

provincialism, but that was too late. By that time a feeling of contempt had come between us. Yet it was precisely at that period that I loved him most deeply, most sensitively—and it hurt me. That was when I played the piano so often, sometimes four or five hours on end. It was always when I was longing for life. He was always thinking about death. I couldn't understand it, couldn't bear it. He was so gloomy. His melancholy looks seemed to catch me by the throat. And if he were thoughtful, it was always over us that he pondered—over our problems. He loved me, always, I'm sure of that. And I wanted to do everything that he wished of me. So now—now I want to obey my fiancé—in everything. I am here with you against my own will. Do you understand that? But let us be quiet—don't answer me. Shall we not sit down?"

It was at this moment that Frau Krafft, still worrying about the rent, decided to force the issue. She would delay no longer.

In answer to her knock Richard opened the door.

"What do you want, Frau Krafft?"

The woman pushed into the room, determined not to be rebuffed at the door, for she had right on her side. "Only the rent," she answered.

"Please come later," Richard exclaimed. "The present moment isn't exactly ..."

But the old woman was not to be put off. She stood in the middle of the room, hands on hips.

"It's my living, Herr Tommsen," she cried. Her self-assurance and her consciousness of being in the right increased as she uttered the words which she had prepared for the occasion.

"It's two months now," she said, "and your notice was too late. You should have given it before the fifteenth—that's your affair—so now it's three months."

208

"I know, I know," Richard answered, his face scarlet, and he made as to show the old woman to the door.

But she moved aside from him. "You may not know it, but I am honest, let me tell you. I only want from you one month's rent, the last month's."

Richard promised her the money. "You shall have the fifty marks—you may depend upon it. But please go now—I will call you later."

Frau Krafft passed out through the door. The scene had disillusioned Elisabeth: Frau Krafft paid no more than forty-five marks a month for the whole house, and she was charging her lodger fifty for this wretched room. How hateful, how disgusting was everything to do with money! Elisabeth had sat down when Frau Krafft came into the room. Now she jumped up.

"I'm going," she exclaimed, "and you are going with me. Come, we'll have breakfast down by the river. Please do, to please me. Don't leave me alone to-day. To-morrow my fiancé will be back, but to-day ... to-day ..."

Suddenly her voice broke, sank to a whisper as she said in a tone of truthfulness:

"That is wrong of me, I know it. You despise me. In your eyes I am an unprincipled woman ..."

"Unprincipled you certainly are not! You are hopeless, you are broken, you are in fear ... but you yourself know that!"

"I know it," Elisabeth whispered. She lowered her eyes as he gazed at her. A slight tremor passed over the surface of her body and could be seen in the movement of her loose white dress. Richard knew that she was trembling.

The cathedral clock was striking. Downstairs Frau Krafft moved noisily about. Along the street thundered the passing lorries.

209

Frederick was in the express, would soon be far away from Lammsdorf. It was hot—a June day. Shortly the Rifle Meeting would be due once more.

Elisabeth tried in vain to subdue the trembling of her body, she could not hide it. She was waiting for a word from Richard, only one, whatever it might be, and at once.

But he was silent, his glance fixed searchingly upon her bowed head.

To-morrow her fiancé would be back again. At that moment he must surely have been thinking of his bride. Perhaps, too, her son was calling for her, if indeed he still knew his mother. How quickly a nurse or maid could take the place of a mother who was never happy and had no use for the little son except to unload upon him her overburdened heart! Some day she would suffer deeply, would cry out in misery and despair, tear at her hair and face while she cursed herself. What a death hers would be!

The house shook with the passing of heavy traffic. The pictures on the walls vibrated. The door and floor creaked. Everything groaned and rattled

with a sound of frailty, of eternal movement, of constant attrition and slow decay.

Frau Krafft tiptoed across the hall. The silence within the room was suspicious and attracted her. She listened intently at the door.

Across the road the Weitner girl opened her window—she was feeling stale from loss of sleep. She wondered whether anything exciting would happen, such as a railway accident, an outbreak of fire at the soap factory, or even the illness of Frau Zamell's child.

“Frau Zamell ...”

Elisabeth looked up, her eyes flickering uncertainly. She heard Richard saying:

“Please don't say anything now, don't answer me. Ah, how beautiful you are!”

210

But that was an illusion: he had not said it. His words were: “Fly from me, fly from me!”

All the colour had faded from Elisabeth's face. Outside the door Frau Krafft in her fright let a spoon fall, but her excitement was such that she remained rooted to the spot. Something was about to happen inside there. It was as good as being at the cinema. Probably he was going to shoot. “I shall run away and lock myself in the kitchen,” was Frau Krafft's thought.

But nothing happened. Frau Krafft felt she had been defrauded of excitement. They were only talking, but so quietly that she could not make out a single word.

“I am ready,” Elisabeth breathed. “I shall never fly from you again!”

With passionate ardour Richard pressed her closely to him.

211



## CHAPTER XXX

**A**LREADY the stars had risen high above the vaporous world. How quickly the day was over! Night had filled the valley below. A few tiny lights glowed from the houses of Bestfeld. How vast the world seemed! Across the hilltops blew the wind, warm summer wind, rustling through the tree-tops—a song of liberated nature.

Elisabeth exulted like a child.

The shoulder of the hill fell away steeply to the valley. Far below was the murmuring river. A chain of lights showed from afar, the lights of the night express. Soon its noise would be audible.

They were sitting at the edge of the high ground. Elisabeth was speaking of the days that were to follow. Richard was not to remain in Lammsdorf, he was to follow her on her travels, unknown to the bridegroom but always near at hand, always within her reach.

“To keep me from falling, to hold me up! You will be like the moon to me, now visible, now invisible, but always near to your earth, bound to her. Isn’t the comparison beautiful? As the moon draws up the sea into its flood, so you will draw my blood, my heart, to you. Oh you ... husband!”

Richard did not reply.

The air was strong, invigorating and odorous. The earth was still warm. Nightingales were singing, and, at ten o’clock, the full moon climbed into the sky. Leaning against Richard, Elisabeth was dreaming. The sleeping world lay extended beneath them. All separate things faded away and lost themselves in the vast unity. She was dreaming with wide-open eyes staring at the moon. Twice

212

already she had called Richard “Eric” when he had kissed her.

How the mist rose from the earth! A delicate veil spread itself over the world. Bestfeld was tiny, the railway no more than a toy. Elisabeth was silent. They lay back in the warm grass. Her heart was beating rapidly. Even the most distant star seemed tinged by her blood.

His hand slipped gently over her bosom. “How beautiful you are!” he whispered. “How beautiful you are!”

Crickets chirped their music. The trees rustled. Through the valley a train passed noisily towards Lammsdorf, but without lights, a goods train. It whistled, and from down the valley came the answering whistle of another train, a chain of light like a string of pearls.

“May the night never end!” Elisabeth whispered. “Never! ... I’m thinking of Frederick. He is far away. He is as nothing compared with this hour. You are my husband. ‘Fell me, what is to happen?’”

“There is no such thing as chance,” Richard answered. “Everything is fate. Everything is involved with itself inextricably—you, he, I. But each is a gateway into the higher or lower world. There is no path leading through the in-between. Life is yes or no. You must decide.”

“It is decided,” she replied trembling. “I am his wife, but your woman, Eric!”

The wind slept. The moon became yet brighter. Mist crept up from the valley. Silence was between them. Not a word was spoken as the hours hurried by.

## CHAPTER XXXI

**I**T was four in the afternoon. Elisabeth opened a telegram with trembling hands: Frederick would arrive at night by the two-thirty express.

The blood left her face, she swayed on her feet, and the maid, holding her up, asked whether there had been a mishap.

“There’s going to be one,” Elisabeth replied and hurriedly wrote a note to Richard:

“One can’t belong to two men, but to one only. Widowhood is stupid. Separation is an impossibility. Come to my help. I will await you at the post-office. If you don’t come I shall send a telegram to Frederick and then you will never see me again.”

The maid was to deliver the letter while Elisabeth dressed. She was at pains to make herself as attractive as possible, for memories of the past night still haunted her.

Always, as Richard had bent over her in the mysterious shadows of the moonlit night, his features had seemed to take on the likeness of her dead husband and had displayed down to the smallest detail all the marks of misery and restlessness which life had engraved on Eric’s face. During those hours she had felt spiritually that these two men were mingled into a single personality, whereby she was urged for constancy’s sake to sin against her constancy, for love’s sake to subdue her love. As the night passed this feeling had become not familiar but increasingly strange, until it had seemed to grip her by the throat and to condemn her to a silence, a coldness, towards the man for whom her heart had beat exultingly when she had believed that he could help her to unravel the perplexities of her life. She who for the first time had delivered up her soul to a man—for she had been telling Richard of

herself the whole day long, uncovering to him all the recesses of heart and mind—now, beneath his gaze, recoiled more and more into herself. Before she could rightly apprehend it a something, strange, mysterious and sundering, had come between her and this man in whose lineaments her dead husband was re-embodied. Convinced that this appearance was an illusion of the senses, she had refused to it the validity which one

recognizes in actuality, and had attributed her terror, whenever she had scanned his features, to the unhappy unrest of her mental condition. Yet in the very moment of ardently desired union with this man there had arisen between them an insurmountable barrier that towered up from spoken words and silent reservations. The night had become a torture, and both of them had welcomed with relief the early summer dawn.

But now she strove to make herself beautiful, and three times she changed her dress. Her little son was playing near her. To-day she had discovered that his face was Eric's; hitherto she had only noticed his eyes which were like her own. It seemed to her that everything was fated to fit into a predetermined pattern. Life was a difficult business, and loneliness a poison that penetrated through every pore. It was true, she admitted, that the previous winter had been a round of jolly parties, social bustle and adoring men. A merry widow they had called her, and her mirror confirmed the fitness of the name.

Ten hours more and Frederick would be back again. And to-morrow ... to-morrow they would set out upon their travels. Then there would be sights everywhere to distract her—hotels, museums, steamships and a thousand other things—for nothing could be so diverting as to travel through the busy, changing world. But what of the nights when happy people retire to their privacy?

"I couldn't live like that!" Elisabeth said aloud.

215

She stepped to the window. Sunshine, nothing but sunshine, day in, day out—monotonous indeed but better than rain and snow, cold and darkness. She hated the darkness.

About the room she wandered. Her child was still playing near her. His name was Robert, a name she loved. Eric, consequently, had disliked it, had never used it, had called the boy by another name. Had that been jealousy disguised as tenderness?

At last the maid returned from her errand. She had not found Richard but had left the letter at his lodgings. Herr Tommsen, she reported, had packed his box, and Frau Krafft thought that he would be going away that day, had perhaps already gone.

"Look after the child!" Elisabeth cried as she hurried from the house.

How the sun burned! How endless the way seemed! How leaden her feet! Yonder at last was the police-station, and the letter-box too, looking just as when she had seen Richard coming down the street from the post-office. Although she told herself a hundred times that he could not yet have gone away, she waited beside the police-station for a tram to take her to the railway station.

For years she had been wont to say scornfully that Lammsdorf was a tiny, insignificant hole, and that one couldn't help bumping into people in the street or running into the arms of every acquaintance. There was, in fact, no such thing as evading anyone in Lammsdorf. But now she found it quite the contrary: the place was so built that one couldn't find anybody one was searching for.

In the tram the other passengers were looking at her. Everyone seemed to be staring. She asked herself what could be wrong with her appearance. It must be that people could see she was unhappy.

216

Twice she rose from her seat to leave the tram, but she had deceived herself: the man in the street was not he whom she sought. As the tram passed down the Langenstrasse she stepped out to the rear platform. An acquaintance was standing there.

"Good-day," he said.

"Good-day, Herr Doctor. Are you going away?"

"Yes, I'm going for three weeks to the sea."

"Indeed."

All the windows of Frau Krafft's house were open. Richard's too.

"To-night I'm stopping in Hamburg, and then across to Sweden via Lübeck. On a sailing-ship—the only passenger."

"Indeed," Elisabeth said. "Indeed."

"Yes," the acquaintance added and looked at her sharply.

The tram turned into the station-approach. Market women, tradesmen, motor-cars—all hastened towards the station.

"They mean to catch the Bestfeld train," the acquaintance added, indicating the crowd. "Perhaps you too intend ...?"

Little red lights seemed to dance before Elisabeth's eyes.

"Yes, what time does it go?"

"Three-thirty—in ten minutes' time. I hope my trunk is there already."

"Yes," Elisabeth replied. "I hope so."

What could be worrying the woman? the acquaintance wondered.

“Do hurry, do hurry,” was Elisabeth’s thought. But the tram only crept, it had plenty of time. Once more it stopped for a passenger.

The editor of the *Lammsdorf Guardian* went by, his spectacles pushed up on his forehead. “I can see you quite well like that,” he was accustomed to say as his eyes blazed

217

beneath the brim of his green sports hat. “Notkuh I’m called. Notkuh, journalist.” His hat was of the variety worn in East Prussia. “Notkuh is my name. I can see through any wall. Good, that’s settled! Time is money. We’ve got no time, so we’ve got no money. So sorry ...” The young clergyman too was among the crowd. All Lammsdorf seemed to be making for the station. Even the barber Weitner came in sight—he was going to meet his son, a traveller for the Zamell firm, who was expected by the express.

“I understand the English fleet is lying off Travemünde,” said the acquaintance, turning once more to Elisabeth who was tearing up her ticket.

“Indeed?” she replied.

Indeed? Indeed? Indeed? What was the matter with the woman?

“I suppose you are going to Bestfeld.”

But the tram stopped. The points were wrong and the driver got down with a metal bar in his hand.

It was becoming unbearable.

“To Bestfeld? Oh no, Herr Doctor!” Elisabeth laughed.

“I thought ...”

“We mean to visit the Lower Rhine, Holland, Flanders, and back through Paris.”

“Indeed,” the acquaintance said.

“Our train leaves early to-morrow,” she added.

Now the station came into view. The crowd pressed everywhere. Oranges, bananas, postcards, luggage, shouts, posters, automatic machines, newspapers, walking-sticks, children, toy balloons.

“Here at last,” Elisabeth exclaimed.

“Best wishes for your recovery,” the acquaintance said, bowing ceremoniously.

But where was Richard?

218

“Platform ticket, please, platform ticket.”

“Certainly ... but the money?”

Elisabeth blushed scarlet. She had lost or forgotten her handbag.

“Next!” shouted the man in the ticket-office.

“Fourth class return Bestfeld.”

Richard! Richard! Where was the Doctor? He would lend her a few coppers.

Weitner’s bald head appeared among the crowd.

“Ah, Herr Weitner ...”

“At your service, madam ... delighted, of course.”

“I must have forgotten my handbag.”

“Of course, of course ... I ... I sometimes forget my own head, which is far worse,” Weitner answered with a broad grin.

She was bound to laugh—a quick, hurried laugh.

“Thank you so much. I’ll send the money to you today.”

“Don’t mention it, don’t mention it. The pleasure is mine.”

An attractive woman, he thought. Charming. But she ought to have her hair shingled. Like a gazelle, so graceful!

But already she was back at the ticket-office. Where was Richard? Not on the platform. But he might come at any moment. “How do you do?” There he was? No. “How do you do? How do you do?” The place was swarming with people she knew.

An incoming train was signalled. The engine whistled.

Elisabeth took up a position on the steps of the subway. If Richard came, he must pass where she stood. Everyone could see her. She swung her parasol in an effort to appear unconcerned.

The train glided into the station. How huge the engine was! A man was coming up the steps from the subway,

219

his hat set low over his face, a suitcase swinging from his hand. No, it was not he. But perhaps he was among the crowd beyond. She felt he must be there. She gripped the handrail tightly—she wanted to cry “Richard!”

“Take your seats!”

Too late! If he were there, she thought, if he were there ... oh, she would go mad!

The train began to move with a jerk. Almost noiselessly it slid away from the platform. From the last compartment a man was smiling at her.

Gone! Gone! The sun was shining. White handkerchiefs fluttered on the platform and from the windows of the train. He was escaping into the world. Gone! Gone!

Elisabeth hailed a taxi.

“Post-office! Quickly!”

The taxi scurried through the streets. The windows of Frau Krafft’s house in the Langenstrasse were still open. There was no sign of life within. Then past the police-station and sharply round the corner to the post-office. No, he was not there.

“Back to the Langenstrasse again, Weitner’s, or number 24, opposite!”

They went past the Swan and took the corner too quickly, missing a tramcar by an inch. In the timber-market a crowd had collected.

“What’s the matter? Can you see?”

“Apparently someone has fainted. Number 24 did you say?”

“Yes.”

She rang the door-bell five times. No one answered her. She knocked upon the door. All was quiet within.

“Through the timber-market to the Ringstrasse, number 17!” she cried to the taximan.

Through the lower Rathausgasse, where yesterday they

220

had bought fruit before setting out on their ramble, then through the timber-market. Elisabeth stood up in the car. No, he was not there. But she noticed an old man with a bleeding forehead, surrounded by a crowd. The taxi hurried on, up the Burggraben and past the soap factory. There was the name painted above it: Eric Zamell. Now across the square, past the police-station, and up the Ringstrasse the car rattled.

“Now to the right! Fourth house!”

The taxi pulled up.

“Wait a moment!”

At the window stood her little son, tapping on the pane. “Little fellow! your mother ... ah, if only you knew!” she thought.

The maid opened the door.

“Has anyone called?”

“No!”

“I left my handbag behind.”

“Are you going out again, Frau Zamell?”



“Yes. Is anything the matter?”

“No.”

Elisabeth kissed her child. Her bag was hanging in the wardrobe. From the writing-table she took some money, a few blue notes. Once again she kissed the child, who was playing by the window, and told the maid that she would not be back to dinner.

“I leave you in charge. Good-bye.”

How she hurried down the stairs. The front door closed with a bang behind her. The taximan opened the door of the cab. “Where now?” he asked.

“To the market,” she replied, and the car raced off.

The factory was closing and Elisabeth passed a stream of her work-people coming down both sides of the street. They greeted her, for she was an object both of their affection and

221

of their gossip—the one was worth about as much as the other. “Hard-working girls,” thought Elisabeth, “many a one is prettier than I.”

She noticed a neighbour, from the flat above her own, with his hat pulled down over his face. How pleasant he had made himself during the past winter!

But Richard was nowhere to be seen. They were already at the market and there was nothing to be done except to get out and pay the fare. The taximan touched his cap.

She entered a florist’s shop and purchased a huge bunch of delphiniums. She loved the blue colour, a concentrated expanse of sky, cold and yet warm.

Crossing the market, which sloped towards the south-east, she saw her manager and his wife coming towards her from the higher end. She hurried to meet them with small steps, for the paving here was so slippery.

Elisabeth blushed. This old man’s gaze always disconcerted her, though his wife was kindly and simple. Elisabeth could form no words of greeting, but in an access of emotion, a feeling of loneliness which she could not resist, she pressed the bunch of flowers into the old lady’s arms. “I’ve always meant to bring you some,” she stammered.

The old couple were plainly delighted, which gave to Elisabeth a tiny glow of pleasure. Then she hurried away from them, down towards the Langenstrasse.

“Now I can tell you,” the manager said to his wife, “that Frau Zamell is going to be married again.”

“But why ever haven’t you told me before?” she asked, a little hurt.

“I didn’t tell you anything about it,” he added quickly, “because I was afraid that the affair might come to nothing. But it seems quite settled now ... the man is a good fellow. Don’t you like him too?”

“Herr Zurnieden?”

222

“Exactly. He seems to have a good influence over her. I should be so glad if it were so!”

“I do like Frau Zamell,” the old lady answered. “With my whole heart I wish her happiness. We shall have to call on them within the next few days.”

Frau Krafft was at home and opened the door to Elisabeth.

“He’s not here,” she said. “He’s gone, box packed and all. I can tell you, Frau Zamell, there was a terrible scene this morning when he came in.”

“What was it, what was it, Frau Krafft?” Elisabeth exclaimed.

“Why, he cried like a baby!”

The old woman did not know where he was or whether he had yet left Lammsdorf. He had paid his bill, packed his box, and locked it. Was there any address on it? Elisabeth asked.

“I really can’t tell you the meaning of what he’s written on it. Look at it for yourself!” the old woman retorted.

Elisabeth walked into the room. Her knees were trembling and she strove to keep a grip upon herself as she read:

“Tommy Schabeu. VII.s.27.”

Frau Krafft could see that Elisabeth was overcome. She led her to a seat by the window and suggested that she might like a cup of coffee.

On the table lay her letter, unopened.

“You’ll soon feel better. Just rest there quietly, my child!” Frau Krafft said. “My child,” she had said, so pitiful did Elisabeth appear to her.

Elisabeth sank exhausted upon a chair. Like the coffee mill which was grinding in the kitchen, her thoughts seemed to be grinding unceasingly the single word “where?” Where, where could he be? And what could be the meaning of “Tommy Schabeu VII.s.27”?

223

No, she could not remain where she was. She could not endure it. She must run through the whole town, through every street—yes, even as far as the cemetery.

She stood up. Once more she read that amazing inscription on the trunk-label. Her hand passed lightly once, twice, over the writing; but, as she was about to move her hand for the third time, a thought prevented her: was it not Eric's handwriting?

She jumped towards the door, ran wildly across the hall. Out, out! She must get out! It was Eric's handwriting—that T, that S—his exactly.

Frau Krafft tried to detain her. The coffee was ready, waiting to be poured, she said. But Elisabeth declined. Snatching her handbag, she gave the old woman a twenty-mark note, and hurried down the stairs with Frau Krafft's blessings following her.

In the market she took a taxi. "Through the town!" she cried.

"A joy-ride?" the driver laughed back at her.

Elisabeth nodded. For aught she cared, he might call it so. But it was no joy-ride for her.

The taxi raced through Lammsdorf. Yet it moved far too slowly—she urged on the driver, until the latter himself took pleasure in the excessive speed, meaning to give the lady a fright. But Elisabeth did not move a muscle. Already they had passed for the third time down the Langenstrasse, crossing the town from south to north; already it was early twilight and the sun was sinking behind the hills, when Elisabeth told the driver to go to the cemetery. Seven minutes later they arrived. Telling the man to wait, she hurried towards Eric's grave. But the flowers she had meant to put upon the grave, ah, they were with that kind-faced lady, the manager's wife.

As before, she sank upon the withered grass and wept.

224

After a while she was aware of discomfort: she was sitting upon something hard which pressed into her flesh. It was a wooden peg, yellow and faded from sun and rain. Unthinkingly she pulled it from the ground and looked at it. Burnt into it was a grave-number VII.s.27.

Elisabeth fled. In the west were clouds. Birds were singing an evensong to the serenity of nature. The graves were bright with flowers. To-morrow would be Sunday and already the cathedral bells were heralding the day of rest.

She had reached the cemetery gates before realising that she had no handbag. Had she forgotten it at the grave? She could not go back for it, none the less she must. The sound of the bells was overpowering, a peculiar sound, as it broke against the Lammsdorf hills. A tomtit came trustfully near to her, looked at her, hopped and flew around her, and then settled upon the path along which she must go to reach Eric's grave.

She moved a couple of paces. The tomtit hopped before her and round her when she stopped. As she moved again, the tomtit kept in front of her, and so they reached Eric's grave. There lay the handbag. The tomtit flew away.

She stuck the peg with the grave number back into its place. She was no longer in haste and fear. She tried to pray beside the grave but could not.

Slowly she turned away. A gardener called to her that the gates were about to be closed. She quickened her pace; and reaching the taxi, returned to No. 17 Ringstrasse.

She threw herself on her knees beside her child's bed. The boy was still awake, and she talked with him for half an hour. Then he fell asleep. She kissed the little hand that lay within her own. In her bedroom she changed, putting on a black evening frock and over it a light summer cloak, with hat, gloves and bag.

225

It was nine o'clock as she left the house. The first stars, pale and uncertain as though in conflict with themselves, showed through the mist that hung over the town.

Elisabeth did not know where to go but wandered aimlessly about the streets. In one of the little alleys near the market someone touched her arm. It was Richard.

She began to cry, and without exchanging a word they walked along to the Burggraben. He had taken her arm in his. She did not resist.

In the Burggraben he said:

"Come, don't let us stay in darkness!"

Obediently she turned back with him along the little alley. In the market a band was playing. There were tables and chairs, crowded by townspeople. The night was warm after a burning day. Glasses clinked amid the singing, chatter and merriment.

Everywhere Elisabeth saw acquaintances. Richard took her to the café where, beside a window on the first floor, he had once sat and watched in

fear that he might see her pass through the market upon the arm of a man. Now he was the man. The windows upstairs were open and the smell of the lime trees in the market-place flowed into the rooms.

They found two unoccupied seats by a window and sat down. There was music everywhere: outside, the drum and trumpet; inside, the languishing melody of violins. The chianti in their glasses glowed ruddily.

“Did you get my letter?” Elisabeth asked.

“Yes,” he answered softly. “And whatever may come, you are my woman. I will never let you go, never!”

“Listen!” she said. “That’s from Greig. Give me your hand.”

Jupiter, that bright planet, glowed high in the south-east. The other stars were pale.

“The wedding march,” Elisabeth whispered.

226

His eyes shone brightly. He tossed his head. There was fire in the wine. His hand did not shake; it enclosed hers in a strong and burning grasp. Yet there was a tremor in his hand, a vibration in his blood. She felt it, she shared in it. “I want to live, Elisabeth!” He spoke softly, one half of his face in the shadow, the other half turned to the light of the room. “I want to live. Once already my life has been shattered—don’t you feel it? This is a return of the past. We have already lived through these hours together. Your fiancé is coming back to-night. The train that carries him is even now rolling through the darkness. Every second it brings him nearer to us. Yet we too are moving. Every second we are carried farther and farther away. It rests with us, not with him, who is to win.”

The music drowned his whispering voice. Elisabeth could no longer understand what he was saying. She saw that his lips were moving, that light streamed from the depths of his eyes. One side of his forehead was bare, turned towards the darkness of the market-place; the other side was overhung with tumbling hair which now and then he pushed back. His face was pinched; fasting had sharpened its lines and thrown into relief his mind, which stood out like a knife above his brows. “He will kill me,” Elisabeth thought, and within her a desire to go on living rose rebelliously against the thought.

“Your health!” she cried, holding out her glass to clink with his.

His mouth hardened, his hand tightened on his glass.

“To Tommy Schabeu!” she exclaimed loudly.

For a moment he paused, reflecting. Then his face lit up and his hand enclosed her own firmly.

“To Elisabeth!” he answered with a laugh, in which she joined.

They drank, joked, called for more wine. How beautiful

227

she looked! He gazed at her ardently. He told her how beautiful she was. Then he took her to the floor above, where there was dancing. As they glided over the floor they seemed to dominate the room and the other dancers made way for them.

Notkuh, the journalist, was sitting with a foreign friend at one of the tables against the walls.

“Look!” he exclaimed, “there is one of the sights of our town—the lady dancing there. Ultra-smart, the latest number of a fashion paper. Rich widow owning the soap factory. A child, so far as I am aware, but with a man at every finger-tip—even ten at her little finger, ha ha! She has scorned me. That’s just how it will be with the fellow she’s dancing with—full swing, then finish. That’s the type she is. To-morrow she’ll have someone else.”

Sweeping past the table, Elisabeth had heard these last words. Richard had to hold her up or she would have fallen. He held her tightly to him and after a turn or two almost carried her from the room.

“Let us get away from here,” she said when they reached their seats.

Jupiter was shining. The smell of the lime trees was enchanting. The chianti glowed. The room was warm, the townhall clock struck midnight.

“Two hours yet!” Richard said.

Elisabeth was chilly, sitting beside the open window. She drew her cloak over her shoulders.

“And to-morrow?” Richard asked. “Shall I never see you again?”

“Always you will follow me,” she answered. “I cannot exist without you.”

“And he?”—it was the old question.

“Tell me, what’s going to happen?” she replied.

“I will never leave you!”

228

They stood up and left the café. In the street she took his arm.

An aeroplane, its cabin lit, was flying away over Laminsdorf. Elisabeth turned round and flung herself upon his breast. She hid her face against his shoulder and covered her ears so that she might not hear the roar of the propeller. He pressed her closely to him. The aeroplane passed out of hearing.

“Two hours yet!” she said. “Stay with me—to the very last moment. I belong to you—you must realise that! Tell me about something! Let us go for a walk!”

They passed through the silent town, across the squares and through the alley’s.

“Tell me about yourself!” she said.

He told her about Angelica. The time slipped by. He did not notice where they were going. It was nearly two o’clock when they reached the station, ten minutes before the train’s arrival. Elisabeth was trembling.

Richard was telling her of Angelica’s death, so far as he knew about it. They stood beneath the chestnut trees outside the station. An engine whistled.

Without a word she tore herself free and ran into the station.

“A platform ticket, please. I’m in a hurry!”

“Are you meeting the express?”

“Yes.”

“It will be an hour late.”

She went outside and looked for Richard. She ran down the station road towards the town—but Richard was nowhere to be seen, he had disappeared. On she went, and turned into the Langenstrasse. There before her was his lodging. She could see no light in his room. With uncertain steps she moved forward. A drunken man was coming towards her. Richard could not be in the house. She turned round and

229

fled from the staggering man, back to the station. Richard was not there. The air was sultry beneath the chestnut trees. She was too exhausted to run further and had to support herself by clinging to the railings that divided the street from the railway track. Everything danced before her eyes.

Then she saw Eric standing beside her. She collapsed at his feet.

Frederick hurried from the train. He was the only passenger to alight at Lammsdorf. He looked around for Elisabeth; he had been sure she would

be waiting for him. An official took his ticket, and he passed into the booking-hall. There—he could scarcely believe his eyes—two porters were kneeling beside Elisabeth who lay still as a corpse on the stone floor of the hall.

She quickly recovered from her faint, recognized Frederick and smiled at him:

“I’m so tired, darling. So glad you are here.”

Then she fell asleep. Her breathing was calm and regular.

He took her home in a taxi and watched all night beside her bed.

Three times more she said: “I’m so glad you are here.”



## PART SIX

231-232

## CHAPTER XXXII

ELISABETH was silent, she seemed unable to speak. Frederick questioned her, but by noon he had resigned himself to her silence. One thing was certain, he must take her away from Lammsdorf as soon as possible.

He had obtained six weeks' leave for his wedding and honeymoon, and began with feverish haste to make the necessary arrangements. Now it was Elisabeth who hesitated.

She must be ill, he thought. But she was not ill. She begged him to protect her, yet would not tell him what was the danger from which she was to be protected. She said: "I will give you everything, everything," and yet would not give him her confidence.

In the afternoon, while Frederick had gone to the registrar's office, Elisabeth sent her maid, pledged to silence, to find out from Frau Krafft whether Herr Tommsen had yet gone away. Richard was sitting in his window. He had not yet gone away, would not go to-day, did not mean to leave before to-morrow. As he sat at his window his lips moved and he seemed to be speaking:

"I have experienced the confusion of the world, just as it is. God is dying: that is the meaning of the world to-day. Is mankind snatching at his inheritance? The whole world is bound by an encircling chain which passes through the unfathomable All. Mystery hovers about us. Problems plague us, breaking down our feeble strength. Yet ... yet! We are not done for. Cowardice be damned! The order of events confronts mankind, through whose insignificance passes the eternal circle. Man must be, whether he will or not. But his gaze is fearless before the illimitable

233

All. To face each night is hard; the brightest day is unrelenting. We are confronted, it seems, by events which no one is able to endure. Confusion arises. Everything is in confusion. Mankind flies to escape beneath the vault of light.

"I hear a cry: Save yourselves! Band yourselves together! Stand side by side! Make music and dance! The voice of eternity no longer speaks intelligibly. It babbles, lacking the eternal spirit which is dead.

Incomprehensible and awful is the eternal jargon, as though the Last Day had come—omen of doom. Close up your ears! Gabble and chatter! Let your laughter shatter the horror that encircles the leaderless earth. Drug yourselves with wine, with every narcotic, so that time and space shall be robbed of their terrors! Bury the terrifying face of death! Turn on the electric lights, flood the world with light! Light! Make light! More light—so that no one need pass a single hour in the terror of loneliness, so that we may suppress the fear that tortures us, the horrible fear of time. Shun meditation—it leads to the inner world which is a gaping emptiness. For God is dead! Dead beyond recall is the eternal God who created our hearts and minds. Heaven and hell are no more—their gates have closed upon them. Good and evil have lost their meaning.

“From the nations make a band of brothers! Build streets and canals—on the earth and high in the air! Faster, faster—so that means of communication may be contrived, so that the message may be flashed and understood: the God of the universe is dying, and chooses the earth for his grave!

“Swifter ships! Faster motors! Trains that move with raging speed! Aeroplanes that the eye can scarcely follow! So that the south may harbour us when the north is frozen! So that the poles may shelter us when the equator bums! Band yourselves together! Stand shoulder to shoulder!

234

The crisis of the world brooks no delay! Hurry! Hurry! Where twenty are working, let everyone set his hand! Let us be a single people of millions upon millions.

“We must away! Away to another star! This one is cracking up, falling into ruin. Men of invention, scholarship, research—work night and day to find for us a way of escape! Save us! We depend upon you.

“Build bridges that sweep and soar through the far universe. We are relying upon you, upon your powers. See, how calm we remain. We sing, we dance, we make love. See, there is no one in this community who is afraid. Every face is tense but in none is fear to be seen. Our women radiate the vigour of life. Healthier than ever, freer, they have become companions, co-partners, comrades in all the movement of life. None the less they corrupt us. That is their nature, as ours is to be corrupted. Women have become free. No longer have they obligations towards us. Even love has at last become matter-of-fact. Our women are earthy—their colours are flesh

and blood. We possess them entirely—they belong wholly to us. We share them with God no longer.

“No more are our children content with the earth, but strive through space to reach the moon or Mars. They grow up accustomed to desires before which their fathers trembled. Only one must get away from oneself: thinking is the death of life. Movement is the trump card. Emotion?—its place is in the comic papers. Each thing in its own time and everything in its proper place! I realise the confusion of the world, just as it is. God is dying: that is the meaning of the world to-day.

“But my dreams do not die. This one dream is ever returning: fulfilment shall come at last. There are no bounds to the ‘I’ which is afire—afire for the unchanging ‘You, until the ‘I’ and the ‘You’ become a ‘We.’

235

“I saw a face, and saw that it was you: delicate, noble and slender: pliant as the willow that no storm can break; beautiful as the roe that haunts the woodland glades. For out of the hidden places bursts forth the stream of loveliness. O, you were delicate, noble and slender! And pliant as the willow! You bent before every storm, so that you were never broken. But the pain of it showed in your face. Then you were no longer beautiful as the roe. Out from the woods you stepped into the sunlight of highroad and street; you let yourself be seen. Your loveliness died. Your beauty became a gypsy. Streets, squares, day and night, street lights and dwellings, trains and mountain and valley, bridges and castles, cities and sea—where indeed have you not scattered your loveliness? You shared yourself with everything—nowhere did you remain your whole self. Here you lived. To-day you suffered here, to-morrow you rejoiced elsewhere. Never were you sufficient to yourself. You snatched at your existence in every place, sought outside yourself and drew everything that you touched into yourself. You distinguished neither between height and depth nor between near and far. About the whole world you let yourself be dissipated.

“How mysteriously every evening smote your heart! Ah, remember! You turned to dance and wine—and the night came on, star by star. What was the night to you? At the first reddening of dawn, when you lay sleeping, the question was: What shall we do to-morrow? Noon came. What unrest pulsed in your blood! To be at peace and free from strife sufficed you. The seasons passed and left no trace upon your inward sense.

But they rent you outwardly—for you were scattered about the whole world.”

“Elisabeth!” Richard cried. “Elisabeth!” He sprang up and flung himself against the wall like a prisoner that longed for freedom.

236

Frau Krafft took fright. She came to his door and knocked.

“I’m leaving to-morrow,” he called. “To-morrow, not to-day. Don’t worry, you shall be paid. You shall have every penny!”

And when he heard her speaking—a murmuring he could not understand—he stepped to the door and without opening it said:

“It’s my belief that there is a recompense—for good as for evil. But what is good, what is evil? Well, it is evil when a lodger doesn’t pay the rent, and good when nothing is demanded of him.”

The door-bell sounded. Frau Krafft did not go to answer it. She asked who was there. The night had given her a fear of her fellow-beings.

Elisabeth’s maid replied with her question. Not till then did the old woman open the door. And she did not cease to be alarmed until Richard came out, in shirt and trousers, collarless and dishevelled.

“Well, well,” said Frau Krafft, “he’s only just got up.”

This scene, which the maid described faithfully word for word, seemed to take place before Elisabeth’s eyes: Richard coming to the door and being led back to his room by the old woman, her hand upon his shirt-sleeve.

“What do you want?” he had asked. “Yes, I shan’t leave before to-morrow.... I don’t know yet where I shall go.... Perhaps I shall call on her once more,” he had said, and then had gone back to his room.

Half an hour later Frederick came back from the town. He began again to question Elisabeth. She stood up. Her face was white and from her hair, now dull and colourless, all the light had faded. “Let us go away this evening, I beg you,” she said.

237

“But why? What’s the matter with you? What has happened to you?” Frederick asked. “Do tell me at last what’s troubling you!”

“Let us go away, I beg you!” she cried.

“What is your mystery?” he asked. He would have pressed her with questions but fell silent when he saw her laughing. It was a strange laugh, a

laugh of scorn. Her features were suddenly tense.

“So this is how you protect me!” she exclaimed. “This is your protection? Very well, very well.” And then she burst into tears.

And so the trunks were packed in haste and bustle. They were to catch the night express from Nürnberg. Elisabeth did the packing while Frederick handed the things to her. Once the door-bell rang: Elisabeth flushed deeply and began to tremble. Frederick held her by the arm.

“I can bear this no longer, Elisabeth,” he said. “Now you must tell me what ...”

But his sentence was cut short, for the maid announced Frau Krafft. Elisabeth sprang from the room. Frederick’s glance followed her, but he could not wait till she returned: he went after her.

Frau Krafft had come to pay the rent, and she was saying that she did not wish to accept any gift—that much he overheard before returning, with a feeling of depression, back into the room. He was ashamed of his curiosity, which he had always tried to curb. He confessed to himself guiltily that he had no confidence in Elisabeth; he was sitting in judgement on her, and he was jealous, horribly and unworthily iealous. But even so, he could not explain her restlessness and secretiveness.

Frau Krafft remained waiting at the door, while Elisabeth, seated in the sitting-room, hurriedly read the note that Richard had sent her. Frederick, entering the room, found her bent

238

over the letter. She sent him to ask Frau Krafft in, and when he had gone she read:

“I am no longer I. I am a Schabeu. But I know the reason for it. You yourself have brought me to it. The die is now cast.”

Frederick came back, accompanied by Frau Krafft. Elisabeth stood up and, avoiding Frederick’s eyes, turned to the old woman.

“Come, Frau Krafft,” she said, “can’t you make your husband understand that I’ve made you a present of rent? Surely I needn’t put that in a letter? What he has written me is all nonsense.”

“But please do write!” Frau Krafft exclaimed.

Frederick felt ashamed that he could have supposed the letter to have been written by ... by ... he could never remember the name. He crossed over to the bookcase, ashamed that he could not bring himself to leave the

room. But he was in the grip of gloomy foreboding. It was horrible, he was powerless against it.

“Very well, I’ll state it in writing to him,” he heard Elisabeth saying. He took down a book which years before he had given to Eric Zamell. There stood the inscription which he had written in it: “To my dear friend on the occasion of his marriage, May 30.” And now he was to marry Eric’s wife, while, at that moment, she was writing: “Indeed I know that you are mine, even as I have always been yours. To-night we go away. To-morrow our banns will actually be published. I shall be his wife, but I am your woman.”

Frau Krafft was shaking her head. The moment was delicious for her, as exciting as if she were at the cinema.

Frederick took down another book. Surely he recognized it; but no, it was one that Eric had given to Elisabeth, with the inscription: “A token of our eternal union.”

239

“So, dear Frau Krafft,” Elisabeth said as she put the pen down, “I hope this will now set your husband’s mind at rest. I have written: ‘You may be assured, Herr Krafft, that what your wife has told you is correct. I have cancelled the two months’ rent.’ Will that do all right?”

“Thank you very much,” Frau Krafft answered. “Husbands”—her eyes suddenly glittered, Elisabeth had never seen such evil eyes—“husbands never believe us wives, never! I suppose we must put up with it! So far as I am concerned ... well, I thank you very much, Frau Zamell.”

Frederick felt ashamed of his doubts. How beautiful Elisabeth looked! She came up to him with a smile and put her arm about him as she said:

“Remember me to your husband. He has no reason to be uneasy. But it’s very honest of him, don’t you think so, Frederick?”

“I assure you, I haven’t said a word against him,” Frau Krafft interposed, already at the door. “Once more I thank you. The letter will be delivered.”

“Good-bye, Frau Krafft,” Elisabeth said, pressing herself closely against Frederick.

Frederick became rigid. “The letter will be delivered.” The shadow was over him once more. He tried to escape from it but it remained. Everything between these two women was plain and transparent. And yet ... that phrase ... that seemed to mean something else ... or was he deceiving himself?

Did the ties between two beings amount to so little? Ought they not to amount to so much? Frederick struggled against the doubt that was assailing him. What he was thinking must surely be impossible. Elisabeth and this woman ...? No!

He held Elisabeth closely to him and laughingly showed her

240

the book in which he had once written: "To my dear friend on the occasion of his marriage, May 30."

Elisabeth shut the book.

"We are already in June!" she said.

Her answer somehow wounded him. He was at a loss what to say and, taking up the book which Eric had given his wife at the same time, he held the inscription silently before her eyes.

Elisabeth said nothing. She read the words, read them again, read them perhaps ten times, as though she could not grasp their meaning or was grasping it for the first time.

Frederick gazed into her face, bending over her as he gazed.

She shut the book. "We will take that with us on the journey," she said.

The door-bell sounded again.

Frau Krafft handed Richard the letter. He was waiting in the street, outside the very door of No. 17 Ringstrasse. He snatched the letter from her hand and hurried to a street lamp, three houses away.

"Well I never!" she growled. "Don't be so wild."

She was quickly at his side again. "It wasn't easy," she added, "and besides ..." she got no further, for Richard seized her arm with a grip that hurt.

"Where are they going?" he cried. "That's what I want to know."

"Why, hasn't she told you in the letter?"

"No! You must ask at once. Please, at once! It's urgent."

Richard forced Frau Krafft to turn round, but she struggled against him, exclaiming:

"That won't do! I'm not going in there again. I won't!"

241

He released her and left her where she stood. In a few strides he was before the door, up the steps and ringing the bell. Elisabeth opened the



door. Her knees trembled.

“Go away,” she whispered, “not yet!”

“It must be now!” he answered, seizing her hand and kissing it passionately.

Points of fire danced before her eyes. At that moment Frederick came out from the sitting-room. She stretched out her other hand to him. He had seen all that was happening.

“Let us go into the sitting-room,” he said, turning to Richard, “please, won’t you come in?”

They sat down at the table upon which a large lamp with a brown silk shade was burning, flooding their faces with its ruddy light.

Elisabeth, her composure regained, felt at ease again. She burst out once more with her bewitching laugh, that laugh which was as infectious as influenza.

Frederick meant to put to them some plain questions, but he was prevented by Elisabeth’s increasing chatter about Lammsdorf, its oddities, its beauties and charms, the market-place, the neighbouring hills—the Rifle Meeting would soon be there, the first booths were already erected. Did Richard mean to visit it? Had he ever been to such a thing or taken part in one? What! Last year?—she fell silent. Now was Frederick’s opportunity of forcing the conversation as he wished.

But the maid knocked on the door: was dinner to be served? Yes, she was to lay for three. “You are staying to dinner with us—I won’t hear of your refusing—good, that’s settled!” Frederick noted that she had said, “with us.”

In a moment Elisabeth had begun again to chatter about her memories of previous fairs and their personalities. Ben

242

Massel, for instance, had looked exactly the same for the last fifteen years; he was Ahasuerus the Wandering Jew, plying his trade as far west as Flanders and as far east as Kovno.

“I know him,” Richard interrupted.

Elisabeth was astonished, even Frederick wanted to know about it.

The front-door bell sounded. Hearing voices outside, they ceased talking. Then the maid came in and announced visitors.

Elisabeth sprang up and hurried with greetings to the door.

“Do come in!” she cried.

“Oh no—we want you to come to us.”

“But why?”

“You simply must come!”

“But I can’t,” Elisabeth replied.

The visitors were by this time in the room; they were the married couple from the flat above. Introductions and greetings over, they renewed their invitation. It was to be just a small party, with dancing, to celebrate the birthday of one of them. Elisabeth’s guests would be most welcome too—they must all come without fail.

“But what about our going away?” Frederick objected, since Elisabeth was accepting the invitation.

“You can go first thing in the morning,” the husband suggested. “We can take you to the station in our closed car.”

“That would be lovely!” Elisabeth cried enthusiastically.

As there was nothing to be said against this proposal, it was countered with “We’ll think about it.”

“But we won’t have any thinking about it!”

“It’s got to be yes or no.”

“Not even that! Yes, simply yes!”

The young couple settled Frederick’s hesitation by making

243

him shake hands on the arrangement. And so it was agreed. Their guests would be expected upstairs in an hour’s time. No ceremony—no dressing—preferably only shirt and trousers, for it was a hot night. But all the more pleasure in dancing, all the more jollity on that account, the wife suggested. And thirst too, her husband added. They all burst out laughing.

“Once more then—we’ll expect you in an hour. Don’t be late.”

“Oh no, we’ll come in good time, trust us for that.”

The visitors were accompanied to the door and took their departure amid general laughter and high spirits. Even Frederick’s face had lost its grimness.

The maid brought in dinner and Elisabeth chattered about her neighbours, saying what nice people they were. During dinner the talk turned to the question of what they should wear for the party. Elisabeth determined to change into the dark-blue silk frock. Frederick laid emphasis upon the fact that their hosts were, after all, strangers, and that no matter how jolly and informal the party might be, one did not know who else

might be coming; he therefore decided to put on his dinner-suit. Richard said nothing at all; he was the problem to be solved. Frederick was very conscious of the difficulty: that neglected suit, how much longer would one have to stare at it before the owner might choose to brush and press it! It wouldn't do, whatever happened—surely the man could realise that. Why was he so obstinately silent? Luckily, thought Frederick, his own clothes were too big for Richard.

Suddenly Elisabeth jumped up. "I've solved it," she exclaimed to Richard, "you can wear Eric's dinner-suit!"

They all proceeded to change. Elisabeth looked lovely. Eric's clothes fitted Richard admirably, and Elisabeth thought how much better he now looked. Frederick was

244

a little too stiff-jointed: his awkwardness spoiled the effect of his well-cut clothes.

Upstairs the dancing had already begun when they arrived. The place was crowded and introductions were out of the question: the host was busied with the entertainment of his guests. Gramophone and wireless played simultaneously—there was music incessantly. In the hall a small table was set out with tasty refreshments.

Elisabeth danced. Seated on a sofa Frederick talked to his hostess earnestly and with a somewhat excessive decorum. Richard was wandering about, when the host tapped him on the shoulder:

"Merry and bright?"

"Oh yes, I'm quite happy!"

"That's good. My sister is sitting on the balcony. She'd be delighted to know you—but I'm not bothering to introduce people."

Richard made his way out to the balcony, which corresponded to that outside Elisabeth's bedroom below. There, sitting alone in the night, was a girl, fair-haired and lissom. Richard introduced himself to her as "Schabeu," and she confided to him that she had no liking for noisy parties.

He sat down where he could see the street below. A motorcar hurried by with glaring headlights. Across the road moonlight fell upon trees and housetops. Above, stars showed from a hazy sky.

"I came here with Frau Zamell," he told the girl.

"Ah, you're staying with her?"

“No. I live at twenty-four Langenstrasse. Architect, as a matter of fact. At least, I was. Nowadays I’m a ...” He did not complete the sentence.

The fair-haired girl asked: “Are you travelling?”

“Travelling? Yes, if you care to call it so. I am going

245

... I ... do you understand? ... I am ... a sort of reincarnation.”

“Do tell me about it! Dancing is so stupid, don’t you think so?”

“Frederick, do say you are enjoying yourself,” Elisabeth exclaimed. They danced well together. Frederick was perhaps a trifle too tall for her, but he seemed unaware of it and she could disguise it. She could not see over his shoulder, but had to peer round his arm when she wanted to look for Richard. But she saw no sign of him and decided to search for him as soon as that dance was over, for she meant him to be her partner for the next.

“What about our going away?” Frederick asked.

“It’s beginning now,” she answered with a laugh, “and the beginning is beautiful. I love dancing. I could dance the whole night through, couldn’t you?”

“With you I could,” he replied.

“I have myself watched myself. I saw myself standing on the seashore. There I stood, and watched myself from behind.”

“I know what you mean! I’ve often experienced that myself!” the fair-haired girl exclaimed.

“That’s how it began,” Richard went on, “that was, so to speak, the first step. A shattering experience lay behind me. It was at that time that I was first able to observe myself.”

“I understand: so that was the end of it!”

“Yes, that’s so. And yet of course it wasn’t the end of it. I am convinced that everything is predestined. Everything is fated. And we are forced to live in such a way that everything can remain fated. To turn aside means disaster. We are always warned. There is only one path for us—

246

every man has his path predetermined within him and is aware, not violently but usually very sensitively, when he steps aside from it. You

know the things that can't be seen. As a child I had a genuine longing for suffering, not theatrically but because I was conscious of what my path was. Later on I shielded myself against it—that was where I made a mistake."

While Elisabeth was looking everywhere for Richard the host came up to her:

"May I have the next dance, Frau Zamell?"

"Yes," she replied.

"Where are you going to travel?"

"Flanders."

"Are you looking for Herr Zurnieden?"

"No."

"And is this story about your getting married true?"

The dance began, his arm was already about her when she said:

"Don't you believe that's possible?"

"The last thing I expected!" he laughed. "But my wife was so genuinely pleased when she heard it that I haven't liked to disturb her belief."

"Always the old story?" Elisabeth asked laughingly. All the lights were burning—that was thrilling. She floated in the glare.

The host spoke again:

"My sister—you know, she's a little bit odd—rushed in to-day with the news. My wife immediately declared she would ask you to join us to-night and that she was almost ashamed of the way she'd neglected you."

Elisabeth laughed.

"I said," he went on, "'my dear, leave Frau Zamell where she is. Our feelingless crowd would be uncongenial

247

to a lady who's just become engaged.' 'For shame!' she said, 'Frau Zamell is awfully nice!'"

Elisabeth laughed again.

"Then came the turning-point," Richard said. "I saw myself no longer from outside myself, a tiny point in the vast world, but saw the world shrunk to a tiny point within myself. It seemed to me so insignificant as scarcely to be worth looking at. I entered upon a new relationship, which I call the higher reality, for in entering the inconceivably small world within I

passed into the universal space of eternity. That was proved to me emotionally. Do you understand?”

“Yes, yes, perfectly!” the fair-haired girl responded.

“I loved Angelica passionately. Her fascination, a mixture of melancholy and serene cheerfulness, held me utterly. I burned with love for her. Her hair, her face, her slender hands mastered me entirely. The sound of her footstep electrified my heart. If I could not see her always, be near her always, I was conscious of an emptiness. Separation from her was torture. Day and night I thought of her, my love was a fever of passion. Often I felt myself to be like an animal and not degraded on that account. On the contrary, the tension gave me a happiness which set my thoughts free and provoked me to laughter. I was in love. I was jealous. My dreams were haunted by Angelica. No woman in the world was like her—she was the entire world, except for myself. I was a tiny point in the wide world, and yet in the longing for bodily relief which Angelica kindled within me I was a wizard with godlike power. The two-bodied beast was the beginning of creation. The world was wide and blue. Then my glance changed from looking outwards to looking inwards. The turning-point came when Angelica was engulfed. The world became small in this

248

particular ‘I.’ Estranged from the senses, which were now an agony, the soul soared upwards, an incomprehensible ‘I’ which was more powerful, more alive and even wilder than the mad animal which had stood before Angelica’s beauty. I realised that in the mind was a higher world. The earth disappeared. There was some Being above the world who yet must contain the world within himself. Do you understand?”

The fair-haired girl nodded enthusiastically:

“Oh yes, I understand perfectly. That must have been wonderful!”

“Yes, indeed it was,” Richard spoke slowly and thoughtfully, “but it was or is a contradiction. It is the tearing apart of the ‘I.’ I love a woman—a bond of the mind is made between us. What home-sickness pierces the breast! With doubled ardour the senses ache in loneliness. I obey the desire, setting aside the earthly law: our two bodies burn together in the hour of passion. Now the heart cries out for its true home. What agony when the vast night, the feeling of infinite forlornness, awakes in us! Two souls—which is to be the leader? Fate is no longer a guide, there is now no preordained path. Fate is two-faced, looking this way but also that way. In

good times the souls of both beings speak together as in harmonious song, which is the godlike voice. That is in good times. But our times are not good—neither good nor bad. The godlike voice is dead, for there is no God. Each man makes a private religion for himself and no longer understands the religion of another man.”

“I understand you,” the fair-haired girl exclaimed.

Above the house-tops a meteor sped along its fiery way. Richard jumped up, thinking of Elisabeth.

“What are you thinking about?” the fair-haired girl inquired.

“I desire union, the union of the demon with the woman!”

249

Richard answered. “I can hold myself back no longer. Fulfilment or renunciation! That is my mission, that is what I am thinking! I am always thinking it. That is my law which cannot be broken. Either the world must break, or I!”

Elisabeth had discovered where Richard was. What is more, it was her host who had told her. Breaking away from the dance, she ran to the balcony.

“Is that you?” she called. Then she saw the fair-haired girl (who must, she thought, be the crazy sister) and introduced herself. The girl stood up as Elisabeth exclaimed: “How lovely it is out here! The night! The stars!” And then she whispered to Richard: “You must stay here with me.”

Her host came noisily out to the balcony and took the fair-haired girl away.

Richard and Elisabeth were alone. Each gazed ardently at the other, their hands clasped tightly. Within the house a gramophone was playing; but the stars were near to them. An engine whistled from the valley. Beneath the moonlit roofs the houses were dark. The street lay silent and empty.

There was an intensity in the pressure of their clasped hands, as though expressing their desire for an embrace in which every part of their bodies should play its part.

Words broke from Richard:

“Break off the engagement, Elisabeth. It’s a sham—you cannot be against yourself. You belong to me. Don’t you yet know me? Sacrifice your insincerity. Let yourself become what you were born to be. Shatter the sham at a blow! I demand it of you.”

“Don’t ask it! I can’t do it!” she answered in defence.

“You must!” he exclaimed.

“But not at once, please,” she pleaded.

250

The fair-haired girl came out to the balcony again and, resuming her seat, gazed at Richard. Elisabeth went back into the room, hurrying among the dancers until she found Frederick, who was looking for her.

Frederick was in a state which might be described as mild intoxication. He did not see Elisabeth’s agitation and anxiety. He only saw her beautiful, delicate face, those eyes which he would love unfalteringly, that hair above the gently sloping forehead, that finely moulded mouth. He saw the slender form, the woman who was soon to belong to him, so soon, in a few days only. He was proud of her: she outshone all other women.

He laughed, kissed her, exclaiming:

“I’m happy here. We’ll never go away, never!”

The host had overheard the words, and repeated them loudly to the company: “That’s what Herr Zurnieden has just said—what he says goes!”

The words were acclaimed with enthusiasm; Elisabeth tried to hide herself. Lammsdorf society was very limited and she knew everybody. She danced lightly, as though on wings. She was in constant demand. She laughed and even sang, but her heart was frozen in anxious apprehension. Frederick seemed farther and farther away from her. He was behaving like a child, to the amusement of the whole company. He talked to the ladies who surrounded him in an hilarious circle. He smashed a glass. By midnight he was imitating the cries of animals, the roar of a lion or the sound of a rattlesnake; he pretended to be an owl and a cock-pigeon. The women began to edge away from him, though the men found him amusing. They had been in need of such a fellow in Lammsdorf where everything was in direct descent from the lamb.

“Capital!” the host exclaimed. “He’d bring tears to the eyes of a stone, Frau Elisa. We’ll put up a booth at the

251

Rifle Meeting for him to perform in. My wife is quite enthusiastic about him, and everyone is saying how witty he is, and inoffensive too!”

The climax of the party had come. Marching up and down among the dancers, Frederick was singing an old street-song of his boyhood days—he



didn't know the modern tunes. Singing at the top of his voice, he soon had an audience that joined in his song. Years, long past and forgotten, came back to him. A man sprang to the piano and poured out a flood of sentimentality. In one corner of the room someone started to sing a folk-song; the air was taken up by the whole room, and suddenly the mood, boisterous and too loud, overwhelmed the now-silenced jazz. Everyone flocked to the music-room, where the piano took up the tune and the crowd became a chorus. Elisabeth's heart beat wildly with the knowledge that a decisive moment was approaching. Frederick, to everyone's delight, began to conduct the singing. The host had fetched a top-hat for him, it was much too small, but that was exactly what was wanted. A folk-song without high-spirits would have been a tame and heavy affair.

Never had the Lammsdorf ladies beheld a face like Frederick's, so beaming with good-nature. "He looks like a young man," Elisabeth heard someone saying. "What a splendid fellow! Such humour, without a single offensive word!"

The half-hour after midnight was striking. Whoever knew another folk-tune was to say so. Already there were pauses. The spirit of the party, in whose blood the unthinking American-African rhythm was firmly lodged, was suffering from lack of breath.

During one of these pauses—every song that could be recalled had already been sung—Frederick, in defiance of the silence, was beating time with an umbrella that had been put into his hand. Suddenly every eye was directed upon two people who had come from the balcony into the

252

brilliantly lit room that adjoined it. One of the two was the sister of the host, the girl who was said to be a little crazy. The other was ... Eric Zamell.

A movement of terror followed. Nearly everyone stared at the pair who approached—a few looked at Elisabeth who was sitting with her back to the door and could not see the two people. The man at the piano had recalled a tune which had not yet been sung—a soldier's song. The first notes rang out. Then someone gripped his arm, the tune stopped. People stood up. A buzz of conversation broke out.

The fair-haired girl and Eric Zamell were coming straight towards the door.

Frederick had taken up the tune; he sang it alone, loudly, even vehemently. It was the song of comrades who had fallen. Tense and motionless Elisabeth gazed at him. It was Eric's favourite tune that he was singing, the tune Eric had been wont to hum every morning while he shaved. How near to her this song seemed to bring Frederick! She wanted to jump up and kiss him, fling herself upon his breast, and cover that kind, honest, child's face of his with her kisses.

Then, in the middle of his song, Frederick broke off. With wide-open eyes he stared at the two people who had reached the door and stepped into the room.

The next moment was uproar. Elisabeth was shrieking. Someone rushed to her help. She stood with her back to the door and shrieked. She had long known it—that he would come from behind. She had not had the strength to meet his eyes, therefore she had seated herself with her back to the door.

A stupid laugh spread over Frederick's features as he stared and stared. For there, where a moment before, his dead friend had been standing, now Richard Tommsen stood. Someone hurried into the kitchen to fetch water for

253

Elisabeth. The whole room was in an uproar. But no one ventured through that door, against the frame of which the fair-haired girl and Richard were leaning.

One of the men had the presence of mind to set the gramophone going. A shrill dance tune sounded through the flat, but few responded to it.

"Do you understand that, my friend?" said one of the party. "I'm ready to believe in mass-suggestion after what we've seen."

"Do you know the man?" was the reply.

"One of her adorers!"

"Yes, I know, but ... are you coming away now? My wife is anxious to leave."

"I think it would be the best thing to finish up as soon as possible."

"Frederick, you are tipsy," Elisabeth remarked.

"I know. So sorry. Have I startled you?"

"You child! Don't let's go yet."

"But everyone is going."

"I'm not, I'm not!" she exclaimed.

Frederick was fully sobered. His head was heavy and ached, but he could see clearly again. He began to think again. He was concerned about Elisabeth.

"I won't ever leave you alone," he promised. "Never! Not for a moment!"

Elisabeth smiled strangely but she caressed his hand which was pledged to protect her. Then she said:

"Do put on your top-hat!" He refused.

Near them a pair had begun to dance again but most of the party seemed ready to depart. Richard was nowhere to be seen, though the fair-haired girl was still standing in the doorway, leaning against the doorpost. Elisabeth kept looking at her as though she had something to say to her.

254

Frederick divined her intention and asked whether he should get up and leave her alone.

"Why do you avoid speaking of him?" Elisabeth asked.

"Let me put on Eric's clothes and then you'll see the solution of the mystery!" he answered, against his own conviction. "I beg you, Elisabeth, not to disturb yourself about a phantom! I have had too much drink, but I'm quite sober now. Do you know the lady over there?"

"Yes. They say she's crazy—because she doesn't dance, sing or drink. You did look sweet with your top-hat at an angle! Where did you put the umbrella?"

"What umbrella?"

"Why, you were using an umbrella to beat time!"

"I must have been drunk! Look, here's that fair-haired girl coming—I think I'll go."

Through all the rooms he wandered looking for Richard Tommsen. He must speak to him, now, while the fair-haired girl was talking to Elisabeth, for he did not want the latter to be near.

The fair-haired girl was saying: "I was to tell you that he would wait for you on the landing."

255

## CHAPTER XXXIII

FREDERICK searched through every room. Wherever he went he was greeted by laughter. Not many of the guests remained—the majority had already left; but those who still stayed were sitting around in little groups, either on the floor or round one of the little tables. They had an air of forced jollity.

Frederick passed out on to the balcony. The night was calm. There could be at times a stillness of anxious expectancy about Lammsdorf, and it reminded him of that night after Eric's burial.

There are cities where no hour is ever silent and villages which are at rest the whole night through. Lammsdorf was something between a city and a village. It slept, everything slept, and yet two or three times during the night a stream of life would pulse through the valley and all Lammsdorf would be awakened, all Lammsdorf would toss in its sleep, turn from one side to the other, then fall asleep again when the stream had rushed by. The stream of life was the railway. One could tell the exact time from the passing trains, one learned that the world still stood upright, that life had not been engulfed in sand. At the long-drawn whistle of the locomotive one could note whether one were happy or whether sadness oppressed the heart. As the wagons rolled by, one realised whether order or disorder were in possession of oneself; care or quietude came with the following stillness. The night trains knocked at one's heart.

Frederick heard the two o'clock train with which he and Elisabeth were to have travelled away. Would they had done so! Yet, strangely enough, he did not regret the evening that had passed. It had been delightful,—indeed, it was

256

still delightful! But that vision of terror! He had nearly gone up to it and put his arms about it. Never before had Frederick stood in need of his friend as now. Of course, that song had been the cause of it all. Elisabeth had told him so when she said: "You must sing it often when we are married—you sing so beautifully." Of course, it was a figment of the imagination. How strong the power of imagination could be! But could it have been that? Oh yes, most certainly, it arose from his longing for Eric Zamell. How

unperplexed life had been between them! How every word had rung true! How firmly everything had stood rooted in their hearts! There had been no power that could disturb them. When they had laughed, what pure pleasure! The tie between them had indeed stood like a fortress, each for the other, always. Every word had been a pledge. "Eric! Eric! I call to you, my dead friend. Elisabeth shall be holy to me. You have given her into my keeping. I swear to you I will be faithful to my promise!"

Hastily he left the balcony. He wanted to find Elisabeth but she was not to be found.

"Whom are you looking for?" his hostess asked. "Frau Zamell—is it she you want?"

In the hall they met.

"Let us go home, Elisabeth."

"Yes, Frederick ... but ..."

"We must say good-bye to our hosts."

"Yes, yes ..." He did not know how wildly her heart was beating. Propriety, to which he was prone, demanded thoroughness: he led Elisabeth from guest to guest, bidding good-night to each. The host tried to switch on the staircase lights, but they were out of order.

"Thank you, but we are quite at home here," said Frederick. "I've got some matches. Please don't bother."

257

"Good-bye, and a pleasant journey to-morrow!"

"Thanks, thanks."

"Give me your hand, Elisabeth. Don't be frightened—we shan't stumble. I'm holding you, and I have got the railing. Here's the first step—careful—that's right! Look out, here's the landing. Come along, don't stand still! What's the matter? Shall I strike a match? Come, darling. What is the matter, Elisabeth?"

"I am afraid," she breathed.

"Dear silly child!" he said. "Come along—here's the first step. That's the way—step by step. Are you really so tired? We're at the first floor already. Come, only another flight. But why are you trembling? Silly child! Let's hurry—I'm holding you safely. I've mislaid my matches or I would strike one. Are you always so timid in the dark? Careful now—here's the next landing."

Elisabeth stood still. She could not move, she could not speak. She felt that Richard was near—he was waiting for her on this landing.

“Come along, please, dear child,” Frederick said.

“Do help me!” she whispered. “Do help me!”

Frederick was at a loss what to do. He spoke to her, questioned her, wanted to call and wake someone, for he could not leave her there alone. He determined to carry her.

“No!”

He besought her, pleaded with her.

Then a hand touched Elisabeth’s and pulled at it. She followed—across the landing and down the stairs.

“Good! That’s the way!” Frederick exclaimed.

The hand enclosed Elisabeth’s firmly and guided her movements. They reached the door of the flat. Frederick was feeling for his key and he was obliged for a few seconds to release her other hand, for the key was in his right-hand trouser pocket. He found the key, but before he could open

258

the door Elisabeth suddenly shrieked: “Eric! Eric!” and collapsed into Frederick’s arms.

Someone heard her cry and was coming with a light from upstairs. Elisabeth was prostrate but not unconscious. They laid her upon the sofa in the sitting-room and covered her with Richard’s jacket. It was in this room he had changed his clothes.

In the meantime the host from upstairs was talking with Frederick in the hall. They were both of the same opinion: Elisabeth was suffering from a nervous breakdown; change of scene and diversion were what she needed. That apparition had been strange indeed, but unquestionably a trick of the imagination.

“It’s such a pity,” the host added. “We were in great form—everyone was captivated by your humour. Do you know Herr Tommy, or whatever he’s really called?”

Elisabeth pulled Richard’s jacket closer round her shoulders—she was shivering. The jacket was so placed that its inside pocket lay just over her heart, still wildly beating, upon which she had put her hand as though its touch would quieten it. But its beat did not become less rapid. A crackling sound came from the jacket, a sound of crushed paper. Hardly thinking of it, a surmise flashed through her: there was a letter in the pocket. Her

fingers pressed and the crackle sounded once more. She felt in the pocket and found a paper, which she drew out. At the touch of it a strange feeling suffused her, she crushed her lips to Richard's jacket with a feeling of gratitude. Again and again she kissed it. Then with trembling hand she pulled out the piece of paper—it was a folded sheet—and spread it out behind the cover of the jacket. As she deciphered the ill-formed writing her heart shook. She could not get the sense of what was written—her mind was in darkness.

259

Then Frederick came in. She hid the letter so quickly and dexterously that he did not see it. He left the room again, and she read it until he came back to disturb her once more. At last he left her in peace—he was very tired. She too went to her bed, but when morning came the light was still burning in her room.

It was decided that they should go away by the morning train.

260

## CHAPTER XXXIV

THE train sped northwards. Frederick had planned a different route for their journey. Not till they were in the train had he informed Elisabeth of the changed plan; she listened composedly, as though the matter were of complete indifference to her.

In the evening they reached Lübeck, where they spent the night. Late the next day, after a tour of the town, they proceeded to Travemünde. Elisabeth refused to return to Lübeck, although her trunk, half unpacked, was still there. Frederick pleaded with her, but she remained obstinate. Would she go back the next day? No, she would never go back there. But why? She was silent.

They spent the night at a small hotel. Retiring early, they occupied adjoining rooms, and at Elisabeth's request the communicating door remained open; she made him promise that he would not leave his room. "You must always be near to me!" she said.

In spite of his thoughts Frederick was asleep well before midnight. Beneath her pillow Elisabeth had hidden Richard's letter. It was not, properly speaking, a letter at all, but a jotting-down of stray thoughts, addressed to himself. She had determined to leave it where it was, but her hand was grasping it. Once she pulled it out, kissed it, kissed it again and laid it upon her heart, pressing it against her as though it had been his hand. And when she slept she dreamed.

She dreamed the bells were ringing. The chauffeur, who was to drive her through Lammsdorf, took off his cap and said:

"Frau Zamell, we are very late!"

Hastily she stepped into the car. It raced madly through

261

the town, across the market-place, through the lower Rathausgasse, across the Burggraben, past the soap factory, past the post-office, then towards the Ringstrasse and back through some narrow streets. Everywhere people stood still and gazed. The sun shone fiercely. Frederick was seated at her side. He took her hand and said:

"But it's all a misunderstanding, child!"



She was about to reply when a motor-horn sounded behind them. They both looked round. A yellow car was following them, travelling as wildly as their own. Its occupant was shrieking and making signs with upraised arms; his eyes were plainly visible—a dead man come to life, Richard Tommsen or Eric Zamell.

“No, no!” he shrieked. “It is no longer a misunderstanding. We do understand one another. I tell you, I know what she is thinking, I feel what she is feeling. Contempt! Nothing but contempt! She wants to be about in the world. Any motor-ride means more to her than my most sacred feeling. She tries to patch the threadbare soul with a new hat. I can do that too! I too know what that is like! I too have felt how tiresome, how ridiculously tiresome, confessions of love can be—that is, when the soul has gone to the devil, thrown overboard like useless ballast. Ha, I fling mine overboard too! I shall catch up with you! Without the ballast I can go faster than you. Out of the way!”

The man sank back in the yellow car. The engine roared, the horn barked. Through the Langenstrasse the chase continued. The two cars raced on. The onlookers stood dumb with terror. The yellow car was gaining, drawing nearer, slowly but ever nearer. Elisabeth snatched at her handbag and threw a hundred-mark note to the driver.

“Faster! Faster!” she cried.

The driver pressed his accelerator-pedal right forward.

262

The motor rattled like a machine-gun. The space between the two cars increased again.

“We must get out of Lammsdorf!” the chauffeur yelled. “I can’t take the corners—the car will turn over.”

“Faster! Faster!” Elisabeth shouted in reply.

In the yellow car the man was standing up again. His laughter drowned the roar of the motor.

“Sham! Sham! I know that too! I was like that before I knew you. But then my heart changed. Yours has never changed. Yours remains what it has always been. It can’t change, it can’t! It has no notion of what is holy to me. It has lost itself for the world!”

The man—Richard-Eric Zamell—lifted up an iron tool and leaned it over the front of the car. It looked like a spear or long knife.

“A ram,” Frederick whispered.

Now the man moved one of the controls. The radiator began to boil. The distance between the two cars was lessening again.

“Faster!” Elisabeth shrieked. “Faster!”

Over the Bestfeld bridge the chase continued madly. The man in the yellow car made a sign with his hand: through the railings into the river, the movement seemed to say. Elisabeth threw yet another hundred-mark note to the chauffeur. The last Lammsdorf house flew by. The high road along which they roared fluttered like a strip of paper in the wind. Horses were shying right and left of the road. Trees swayed and bent in the rush of air. Elisabeth shrieked as a dog ran under the wheels; its mangled corpse was flung into the air against the yellow car that followed. The countryside turned like the wings of a giant windmill with its centre on the horizon. In the fields people ran about, raising their arms threateningly. The yellow car came nearer and nearer. The air rushed past with the sound of a thunder-clap,

263

like thunder that mocked at her heart. She seized Frederick’s hand and flung herself against his breast.

“He’s going to ram us, my child,” Frederick said. “It’s a misunderstanding.”

“Faster, driver!” Elisabeth cried.

“We’ve too much ballast,” the driver replied. “Throw your fiancé overboard!”

“I will sacrifice myself,” said Frederick, but Elisabeth held him fast.

“No!” she shrieked. “I couldn’t bear it! William is sacrifice enough!”

From the yellow car came a sound of spluttering laughter. Frederick tore himself free and sprang out. The yellow car passed over his body.

Elisabeth hid her face. Laughter and cries followed her. Then a wild voice that pierced her heart shouted behind her:

“It was you who willed it, not I. I have tried to keep from speaking of it. I have been silent, long silent—but you do not understand my silence. Now my words ....

The yellow car drew nearer—it was upon her! Crash! A knife pierced through her breast.

With a cry Elisabeth awoke.

Frederick was helpless to comfort her. He was at a loss what to do.

“What will the hotel people think if you cry like this?” he kept saying. “Do remember where we are, Elisabeth. We are not husband and wife yet.”

But she would not let him leave her. He had to sit upon her bed until, about four o’clock, she fell asleep at last. He too was dozing and, awaking with a start, crept back to his room and lay down to sleep. She had told him nothing, not one word of the dream had she confided to him.

In the morning Elisabeth urged him to continue the

264

journey. He was anxious to return to Lübeck for her trunk. But she could not be left alone and finally consented to go back with him. That day Frederick was forced to admit that it was a torture to travel with her.

A telegram was sent to Lammsdorf, asking for letters to be re-directed to a village on the Elbe, to which they meant to proceed the next day. The idea was Elisabeth’s. Two rooms at an inn were reserved for a fortnight; Frederick hoped that peace and solitude would be of great benefit.

They arrived the next day—it was the twenty-fourth of June. The village was off the beaten track, and they were the only guests in the inn which was built immediately beside the river. The innkeeper was employed as a ferryman, taking the country folk, travellers and pedlars across the river. There was always someone who wanted to cross over.

Elisabeth was reserved and calm. Much of the time she walked hand in hand with Frederick or watched with interest whatever was passing. She talked even of Eric’s death, and Frederick told her about their days of comradeship in the War. She knew it all well enough—word for word it was what Eric had related to her. Much of it she made Frederick tell her a second time.

After sunset, when the red disc had sunk into the mists, they went on the river in a rowing boat. As the stars came out, Frederick began to talk, her head resting upon his knees. Memories of nights in Flanders came back: how Eric had been in an attack; the romance of trench life; the grim earnest of the battlefield, where, when the homeland died, only the bonds of comradeship held life intact.

Frederick felt happy; Elisabeth was silent and introspective. But when they were coming ashore, she said:

“It’s been a lovely day!”

Light was still burning in the parlour, and Frederick

265

pressed Elisabeth to sit with him there a little while before she went to bed. The ferryman, his wife and a journeying pedlar were sitting round an oak table. To-morrow would be fair-day in the village on the opposite side of the river, and so, someone remarked, the steamboat from Hamburg would come thus far up the river.

Things had already been quite busy over yonder. A fortune-teller, who went round the annual fairs, had arrived—Ben Massel or some such name.

Elisabeth joined in the conversation. She too knew Ben Massel—he came every year to Lammsdorf where she lived.

“Lammsdorf indeed!” the pedlar exclaimed. “I’ve been there too—I remember Ben Massel was there a year ago.”

“What a small world it is!” Elisabeth remarked.

“There’s a soap factory there, whose owner had just died,” the pedlar went on. “My word, it was a fine funeral! It wasn’t said, however, that the dead man had lived a particularly happy life. I heard a lot of gossip—I wonder whether any of it was true.”

Frederick’s denial was immediate. One oughtn’t, he declared, to pay attention to such gossip. Hadn’t the pedlar anything better to do in life? Moreover, the soap manufacturer had been a friend of his.

The pedlar declared that he hadn’t said anything at all.

Elisabeth pressed Frederick’s hand silently as they went upstairs to their rooms on the first floor—with a view of the river, as the innkeeper’s wife was constantly remarking.

The view was the best thing these rooms could claim to recommend them. Calm and full, the broad river flowed through the night. Along the banks signal lights were glowing, now here, now there, short or long, red, green or yellow. A tug, monotonously thudding and hissing, came upstream. It took a quarter of an hour to pass, fighting hard

266

against the current. When it was out of sight, the innkeeper ferried the pedlar across. Elisabeth and Frederick waited till the boat returned. They leaned out of the window, entranced by the scene. The air was cool, and it was time to go to bed. But he could not bring himself to leave her.

That night Elisabeth became his wife.

267

## CHAPTER XXXV

THE next morning, after a brilliant sunrise, they were drinking coffee in the parlour. The innkeeper came in with the visitors' book, in which such details as name, age, profession, single or married, had to be recorded.

Frederick glanced at Elisabeth. She was blushing deeply: never had she looked so beautiful, he thought. But he could not disguise from himself a feeling of embarrassment and determined not to deal with the book while her questioning glance was fixed on him. They were planning to cross the river and visit the fair in the village opposite. Elisabeth left the room to fetch a scarf from her bedroom.

"You are married?" the innkeeper inquired.

"Yes," Frederick lied. He wanted to add, "Why ever should you think otherwise?" in order to allay suspicion, but the words would not come. Hot and embarrassed, he took the book and wrote: "Eric Zamell and Frau Elisabeth from Lammsdorf."

He looked with surprise at the words he had written. He was ashamed of the untruth. A sensation of being stifled assailed him—was it fear? But it was too late to retreat—the words were written. The innkeeper stood beside the table and looked at Frederick's hand, whereon no wedding ring was to be seen. It was an uncomfortable moment.

Elisabeth returned just as the man read aloud the entry that Frederick had written. Her colour changed, she became deathly pale. Frederick took her hand as she turned away. The innkeeper had not noticed her changed face.

Together they walked down to the ferry; the innkeeper was to follow immediately and row them to the other side.

268

Frederick recounted quickly what had happened; he begged her not to think ill of him.

"Let us go away," he pleaded. "I am ashamed of myself. Do forgive me!"

"Of course it had to be so," Elisabeth answered. "Everything is fated."

A feeling of depression came over Frederick. All his happiness seemed to have evaporated. When they had crossed the river, the innkeeper pointed

out the road leading to the village where the fair was being held. It was a dusty road, but the beautiful and fertile countryside was aglow with colour.

Once more Frederick brought the conversation back to the visitors' book. He told her how he had come to make that entry, how the innkeeper had looked at him so questioningly, so suspiciously, that he must have written "Eric Zamell" involuntarily. Elisabeth allowed him to do all the talking. He went on to make surmises about the pedlar, suggesting this, that and the other thing, until at last Elisabeth exclaimed: "Don't let's talk about it. What has to happen will happen." These words only increased his agitation.

After a short walk they reached the village, but the fair had lost its appeal for them. Elisabeth, none the less, was determined to have her fortune told. Her insistence distressed and irritated Frederick. To his way of thinking he was her future. He refused to accompany her into the booth, and as she would not go alone there was a small scene between them—their first, as Frederick told himself. The first would be the forerunner of the hundredth, he thought gloomily. He had resisted her whim partly because he was conventional and conscientious, partly because he was grateful for the events of the past night; and how, he asked himself, could anything so ridiculous have ended in this disagreement? Now for the first time he had believed that he really possessed

269

her, for she had given herself to him; and his happiness, his gratitude, everything within him, flowed out to her. Why could she not be as he was, calm and self-contained? What, in this moment, was the future? She was never at rest, Eric Zamell had said. "Ah, dead friend," thought Frederick, "help me now!"

He turned to Elisabeth. "I love you—my love is greater, stronger than ever!" he said. But she did not answer.

Her clothes made her conspicuous among the country-folk, whose eyes followed her everywhere. Frederick would have hurried away, but she insisted on remaining. She had made up her mind that the fortune-teller should tell her future. With tempers somewhat ruffled they turned aside into a little inn for lunch. Here, with the room to themselves, their good spirits returned. He laughed over her whim, which was all nonsense, especially for so pretty a woman. The sun shone from blue skies; the music of the fair

filled the gay world. Everyone laughed and spent money. It was indeed a day of carnival.

Frederick still refused, when they came again to the fortune-teller's booth, to accompany Elisabeth inside. She must go in alone if she couldn't do without such nonsense. So she went alone into the tent.

"Last night I was his wife—to-day he leaves me alone!" was her thought. "Last night she was my wife—now she runs off to have her fortune told!" was his. Thus could their opposition be expressed.

The sun was blazing but over the western horizon clouds were heaped up. A storm was approaching—the country-folk knew it already. Frederick looked at his watch, he had been waiting for half an hour outside the tent.

Ben Massel was holding her hand—that slender, delicate hand. Elisabeth was trembling and asking herself what he could know about her.

270

The clouds spread across the sky with raging speed, blown by the hot wind that rustled through the poplar trees beyond the dyke. Across the fair-ground with its brightly coloured crowd a high-laden farm wagon made its way. The horses were restive amid the blare of music—and the first flash of lightning blazed in the west.

"Do not fear the strong man," Ben Massel was saying, "for he is the custodian who will open the gates behind which your life is being played. But I see clearly that you are possessed by a fear which struggles against your prayers. You desire to see the wonders of the starlit night in the face of a dining-room clock. Yet your heart is warm—the hot fire that melts metal. You are weak—shall I tell you what is in store for you?"

"No!" Elisabeth whispered.

Behind the dyke barges were passing. Funnel and mast were visible, the dull note of a siren sounded from the tug. The sun disappeared. The flaps of the tent fluttered noisily.

Frederick pulled out his watch once more.

The steamboat from Hamburg must have arrived. Crowds of townsfolk pressed into the fair-ground. They had come for drink, swings and, later, dancing in the big tent. The thunderstorm came nearer, the first raindrops were falling.

At last Elisabeth returned. Frederick awaited her in silence. They hurried to the inn, into which everyone was crowding, and found two seats still vacant at a table. An hour later the thunderstorm had already passed

northwards. They decided to return and were being ferried across the river when Elisabeth discovered that she had lost Richard's letter. She was thrown into a state of great agitation. Was Frederick the strong man? Was it he who would open the gates behind which her life lay? She put her hand in his; he pressed it, though he kept his face turned from her. In his eyes was an expression of sadness.

271

The Hamburg steamboat was moored beside the inn. It was to begin its return journey at midnight, the landlady remarked.

That evening, about eight o'clock, two men came over the river. Entering the inn, they sat down at the table where Frederick and Elisabeth were taking supper. One of the men had with him the letter which Elisabeth had lost and was reading it to his companion. Frederick paid no attention—he was too concerned because Elisabeth had no appetite. But he could not help noticing that her eyes all the while were directed at the strangers. Then he overheard their conversation:

"If only Tommy were here ... but that doesn't make sense ... can you understand what it means?" The two men continued to read the letter.

"Elisabeth!" Frederick exclaimed.

She started violently, but it was a composed face that she turned to him.

"That means 'soul,'" one of the men remarked. "'So I take your soul with me into eternity, for that is the sacred demand of all souls. To return is for me a necessity—and that is destined for the sixteenth of June at Lammsdorf. Tommy Schabeu.' I can't get the meaning of it."

One of the men—he was wearing a grey suit—gazed up at Frederick and his glance swept over Elisabeth. Frederick was about to leave the table when the man in the grey suit said to him:

"I expect you're waiting for the steamer that's going back to Hamburg."

"No," Frederick answered, "we're staying here."

Just then the thunderstorm came back again, and the landlady closed the windows.

The man in the grey suit bowed slightly and was about to speak again when his companion interrupted him:

272

"Excuse me," he said, "perhaps you ....



Outside the storm raged violently over the countryside, lighting up the river with a magic glow. It seemed as if the house must collapse beneath its rage.

Frederick then asked about the letter, but the man in the grey suit was uncommunicative. A wall seemed to shut Frederick in.

Lightning blazed through the wild night. The river raged noisily. Elisabeth cowered at every thunderclap. The two strangers looked unconcernedly at one another, talking in quiet tones; at last they got up and in spite of the weather went out into the night. The inn shook with the violence of the storm. Branches, wrenched from the tall poplars, crashed to the ground. Leaves, twigs and stones rattled against the windows.

Frederick and Elisabeth remained seated at the table in silence.

Lightning and thunder merged into a single outcry of nature. The siren of the steamboat broke into a howl. The landlady rushed at the window. In the village across the river something was burning—the flames rose high above the dyke.

“I am alone, quite alone!” Elisabeth thought as Frederick got up to go out into the storm.

From the village bells pealed clamorously. The man in grey suddenly came back into the room: did Frederick mean to go across? The whole village was already burning. Help would be needed. Elisabeth did not hold Frederick back from going. The steamboat took the men across the river while the landlady stood upon the bank in the rain.

Elisabeth was left alone. But she saw the parlour door opening and the man in grey coming into the room. She saw that the letter was in his hand; he gave it to her.

“Are you Frau Zamell?”

273

“Yes.”

“And Tommsen, where is he?”

“I don’t know.”

“So he hasn’t been here?”

“No,” she whispered.

“Will he come?” the stranger asked.

“Yes,” Elisabeth cried out. “Yes.”

In her fear, uncertainty and loneliness she had imagined this. For Frederick was not the strong man. Frederick did not open the gates.

Higher and higher rose the flames above the village beyond the river. The lightning receded beyond the plain, the storm died away and stars peeped through the clouds. But not till morning had the fire burned itself out.

Elisabeth pretended to be sleeping when Frederick returned. Without a word he undressed, lay down and snored.

## CHAPTER XXXVI

**I**T was August.

A miracle had happened, if the signs were to be believed. But might they not be deceptive? Often it seemed to Frederick a dream that Elisabeth was at last happy and his wife—legally his wife.

The shadows had passed away. Elisabeth had spoken and told him everything. No longer was there anything hidden between them. He trusted her and believed in her.

Yet there were times—always in the night—when a fear crept into his mind that this happiness was not to last and was something which existed only in virtue of its relation to the inn where they still lingered.

It was August. Already the sunflowers and dahlias were in bloom, and a few yellow leaves were falling from the poplars. Beyond the river the horizon looked bluer and the plain was grey in the morning light.

It was five weeks since the village had been burnt—“our village” as Elisabeth now called it; for, in the morning following that night of storm, they had been taken across to see the ruins. They had not spoken until they had reached the scene of devastation. Almost the whole village had been burnt to the ground, and those farm buildings which had escaped the conflagration were already overcrowded with the homeless people.

Frederick had turned to Elisabeth and said: “You are rich. You must help.”

“So I will,” she had answered.

Thus she had adopted the village. Seven houses were built at her expense. She had wired instructions for the sale of her properties at Lammsdorf: the house near the bridge

275

and the house in the Langenstrasse, as well as the land she owned around Bestfeld. That had been Frederick’s wish, and in agreeing to it there had come to Elisabeth a vision of life which till then had been unknown to her: to work for others, to live for others.

The vision smote upon her heart. Day after day she and Frederick went over to the little village, and wherever the misery of a homeless family was to be lightened there she was ever to be found. Frederick had suggested that

in order to help the work of rebuilding she should advance money at a very low rate of interest; but she insisted, to his evident satisfaction, that whatever money she spent must be a free gift.

Their life became one of blessedness and increasing joy. Gradually she disclosed her soul which, shy and timorous at first, at last was laid bare to him. She made it a condition of her benefactions that her name should not be made known in connexion with them, and the village overseer was pledged to secrecy.

“That is how I feel about it,” she would often say.

“Your face already shows it,” Frederick would answer.

Now they could laugh about their former plans of travel—Flanders, Paris and the Rhine. The village across the river was much vaster and more important to them than the great bustling world.

It was during these happy days that their marriage took place. There was no celebration; only a simple ceremony was conducted in the village church, where the whole community attended in holiday attire. The broken windowpanes in the church remained as evidence of the fire; the summer breeze flowed through the cool building into which the swallows had already made their way, fashioning their nests beneath the chancel. The damaged organ could not

276

be played, but the villagers formed themselves into a choir. Elisabeth had never known anything more delightful. She was thrilled by it and began to contemplate benefactions on such a scale that Frederick was forced to intervene with an appeal for caution.

The days went by. The weeks flew. Frederick’s leave was coming to an end. He had decided to give up his post and had already sent in his resignation. After Christmas, when he would be free, he meant to take over control of the soap factory. He no longer opposed the idea.

August. Sailing barges, loaded with the harvest, passed up and down the river. The clouds assumed fantastic shapes in the deep blue sky which already hinted at the autumn. From day to day the flowers bloomed with increasing luxuriance.

Frederick had packed his trunk. Elisabeth was to remain behind until the rebuilding of the village should be completed. In four or five weeks he would come back to fetch her away. The eve of his departure had come.

The last night of their happy life together had arrived. Beneath their open window the river ran murmuring by.

"Now you are really my wife," Frederick whispered. "Yes," she answered, and wept—but with happiness, she insisted.

The night was clear. It was nearly midnight. Soon the village clock would be striking; the wind was from that direction, so that one could not fail to hear it. How well they knew those sounds! They could have distinguished them among a thousand—that creaking and asthmatic village clock that told so harshly the passing of hours and days.

Hand in hand Elisabeth and Frederick lay listening in the half-darkness. No, that was not the village clock ... it was the bell of the landing stage across the river. Someone

277

must be ringing for the ferryboat. There was no inn in the village—the old one had been burned—and travellers were obliged to pass the night at the ferryhouse.

"Perhaps the innkeeper's asleep," Elisabeth said.

"Then I'll have to get up," Frederick replied. Of late he had occasionally deputized for his host who was busy with the harvesting.

The bell sounded once more from the other side. "I'm going to get up," Frederick exclaimed.

"Please stay here," Elisabeth whispered.

The village clock began to strike midnight. Twelve creaking strokes sounded across the water. Downstairs there were noises in the parlour.

"He's getting up," Elisabeth said. "Now I won't allow you to leave me. How can you go away to-morrow when I want you always with me?"

Frederick's heart beat passionately against hers. Across the water the bell sounded again.

"Who can it be so late?" Elisabeth wondered, sitting up in bed so that she could look across to the opposite landing stage, prompted—Frederick thought—by anxiety to be of help. "Our village lies quite still," she added.

"Can you see anything?" he asked. Her eyes were sharper than his.

"I see a man," she answered. "He's standing still, waiting on the landing stage. Listen, do you hear? The ferryman is already in the boat."

Then she lay down again. The night was light; its serenity communicated itself to them as they listened, hand holding hand, to the regular strokes of the oars. The boat was already on its way across.

Elisabeth began to cry, a sudden thought of the approaching separation overclouding her happiness. Frederick talked

278

about the village. He had still a thousand things to say. A firm of building contractors had delivered a very bad lot of stone. Work had been stopped on one building. Extra workmen were needed. Ah, there were so many things to attend to! It was a great pity that he had to go away at this time, but it would be stupid to upset himself about it. The separation in itself would be hard enough to bear.

"How light it is!" he exclaimed. At his words Elisabeth wept again, and as if to comfort her he added: "But it's always so in August."

By this time the ferryboat must have reached the far bank, probably it was already returning. The poplars rustled. The river murmured.

"You won't be lonely," Frederick tried to reassure her. "I shall always be with you in spirit. What wonderful days we have spent together!"

Elisabeth wanted to pray but his presence would have embarrassed her. She was frightened by a feeling of being already lonely. Would her happiness desert her? No! It must not!

The boat had returned. They heard voices, the clatter of oars, the rattle of a chain, voices again and footsteps.

"It's someone to sleep here," Frederick suggested.

"Don't go away to-morrow" was Elisabeth's beseeching answer.

Now there were voices in the house, then footsteps on the stairs. The ferryman was showing the late arrival to his room, the next room to their own. Elisabeth's heart beat with a strange wildness.

"Why must you go?" she whispered. "Is it necessary? Stay here. Don't go away to-morrow!"

The ferryman was saying good night. The stranger

279

acknowledged it with a mutter. Noises came from the next room.

"Go to sleep, Elisabeth," Frederick murmured softly. His own heart too was beating quickly, but he would not let her know.

The stillness of the night was everywhere.

280

## PART SEVEN

281-282

## CHAPTER XXXVII

FREDERICK rose in the grey of dawn after a sleepless night. Elisabeth had been asleep for more than an hour; he did not dare to wake her, but wrote a long letter full of blessings and wishes—an avowal of happiness, of eternal gratitude and eternal fidelity, of faith and trust. His gaze lingered upon her as she lay there, her pretty head resting on one small hand, the other hand stretched out towards where he had been lying.

But he tore himself away and demanded from the landlady a multitude of promises. She was to take care of Elisabeth and particularly not to allow her alone upon the river. Finally he tipped the woman handsomely and gave her his address so that she might wire him if necessary. Then he went out into the morning. It would take him two hours to reach the station. Often, very often, his anxious heart bade him turn back. But he was a man, and a man must obey the dictates of reason and be deaf to the voice of the heart.

Elisabeth was awakened by the siren of a tug. It was full daylight. Frederick had gone. She did not want to realise the fact. Her heart fought against acknowledging it. She clasped her hands and began to cry.

Then she found his letter, the farewell blessing of a husband. Happiness and pain possessed her at the same time. She wept and laughed, but tears had the mastery.

In the next room the new guest was moving about. He heard Elisabeth weeping, heard her footsteps when she went to the window, heard her washing and dressing. He had been listening, too, when Frederick rose and took farewell

283

of the landlady. From behind the curtain he had watched him set off in the chilly morning.

The decisive hour was approaching.

After Elisabeth's departure from Lammsdorf Richard had remained there for a few days, spending most of his time in taverns and drinking until the world had seemed to open out and life had lost its gloom. When these days of apathy had ended he had journeyed to Hamburg with as much of



Elisabeth's money as had been left from his drinking bout. There he had sought refuge with his friend Jensen.

The latter had attempted to rouse Richard from his pitiable condition but had soon realised that his efforts were in vain. The visitor had refused to speak about his life in Lammsdorf, though his friend had closely questioned him. An open quarrel had at last broken out between them.

They were in the sitting-room of Jensen's bachelor flat on the Alsterufer. Jensen's fiancée, who was with them, was discussing architecture, art and literature, and expressed opinions which Richard flatly contradicted. The host himself was a listener. The girl—with her shingled hair, short skirt and cigarette—kindled in Richard a feeling of hostility, and the conversation became increasingly personal. She was maintaining that woman was the vehicle of culture. America—where man was nowadays what in reality he ought to be, a breadwinner—already provided a good example of that. The ascendancy of man was over, she said, and a thousand facts must convince Richard of it. He did realise it, he retorted, but she was not to imagine that this meant the beginning of a new epoch; it was nothing but the melancholy end of an old song.

That was still better, the girl replied. Henceforward there would be the new song, the song of victory.

Victory? Granted that it seemed to be victorious. Europe was done for. But the sun was rising in the east. In the

284

west darkness was gathering, and all her Americanism was no more than miserable candlelight.

Later on, the conversation had turned to women, the sexes, love and marriage. Richard asserted that a woman with short skirts was useless as a wife, except as a bad one, for, he declared, dress was not a mere superficiality for which any pretext would serve but the expression of inner reality.

His opinions, the girl declared, were out of date. Youth of to-day could only laugh at them.

What youth did she mean?

The youth, she answered, to which he at any rate had never belonged.

Richard replied that he was fortunate if it were so. The girl retorted that he was a prehistoric man.

At this juncture Richard asked the girl whether it were really her intention to marry his friend. In his excitement he spoke of himself as a reincarnation—a reference to his resumption of Eric Zamell’s personality—and the girl declared that she would not discuss her marriage with such a man.

But within five minutes it became clear to Richard that Jensen had seen the letter which Elisabeth had lost, his letter wherein he had written: “Schabeu, that is a man who comes back. I carry Eric Zamell’s soul within me.” Words that wounded like daggers passed between the two friends—questions, half-answers, threats and bitter reproaches. Richard demanded to know where Elisabeth was staying. Jensen refused to answer. Accusations of betrayal were thrown from one to the other.

Later, when it was nearly morning and the girl had at last gone home, Jensen recounted what had happened to him in the inn beside the ferry. He realised that Richard was in the grip of a hopeless passion which had deranged his mind. The talk about resuming the personality of a dead man was

285

just empty pretence, a pitiable form of cowardice in the face of relentless facts.

Some days later Richard disappeared. His friend gave him up. Having no money, Richard had set out on foot from Hamburg and after walking two days had arrived at the ferryhouse inn.

At eleven o’clock Elisabeth left her room and went down to the parlour for breakfast. A quarter of an hour later the landlady ferried her across the river. She was going to her village.

Richard was alone in the house. He wept noisily, crying for help. His door was bolted—he would not go out and hasten after Elisabeth. It was too late: he had already discovered that she and Frederick were married. He had lost. But he must see her. The whole day he waited without moving from the window. The landlady knocked on his door, but he would not open it. Towards evening the ferryman knocked and demanded that Richard should open. But the latter knew the rights of lodger and host—he would be left in peace, he did not feel well.

It was already getting dark when Elisabeth returned. For a moment, perhaps for a fraction of a second only, her eyes were directed searchingly

towards the window where, behind the curtains, Richard stood watching.

The landlady came upstairs an hour later, accompanying Elisabeth to her room. Richard heard the door being bolted. Then the landlady knocked on his door and asked whether he wanted anything to eat. He opened the door, his knees shaking with weakness and excitement. Once more she asked whether he were hungry and how long he expected to remain at the inn. So that Elisabeth might not overhear him, he whispered, with an assumed hoarseness, that he was not feeling well, would like a cup of tea but nothing to eat.

286

“Certainly,” the landlady replied, “but will you please sign the visitors’ book?”

Upon his assurance that he would come downstairs immediately the landlady left him, and he followed her a little later. Light showed through the cracks of Elisabeth’s door: he could not take his eyes from those stupid strips of brightness which seemed to vibrate before his vision.

Downstairs a door was opened. The landlady appeared with a light and stood listening.

“Are you coming down?” she called up the stairs. She was keeping her promise to take care of Elisabeth; like a dog she stood guard over the young woman whose husband was relying upon her protection.

Richard crept downstairs. The ferryman was still busy with the harvest; the landlady sat down with Richard at the table. The visitors’ book lay open beside his cup.

Richard read: “Frederick Zurnieden and Frau Elisabeth.” He sipped with relish the tea for which he was unable to pay and did not notice what Frederick had previously written a few lines above: “Eric Zamell and Frau Elisabeth.”

What if he did see it? Frederick had confessed to his false entry on the day he had written it, and the host had merely laughed. On the wedding-day he had put his own name and his wife’s into the book: Zurnieden. That signified for him that the past, like the false entry, was over and dead—a new life had begun. And Elisabeth had sat beside him, saying: “Yes, so let it be!”

“You aren’t feeling well?” the landlady said to Richard.

“No.” But, he explained, his condition was not bad, he was accustomed to it—a trouble that dated from the War, a form of malaria which was

getting better with time.

Then he asked: "When did the Zurniedens get married?"

"Do you know them?"

"Yes—I've lived in Lammsdorf."

287

The woman scanned his face with distrust. There was something strange about him, something that wasn't quite right.

"They were married three days ago, over in the village yonder," she said.

He continued to drink his tea while she watched him. She decided that he was a tramp.

Elisabeth could be heard upstairs singing a children's song: "Do you know how many stars are shining? ..."

Just then the bell of the far landing stage began to ring.

"I must go over," said the woman, rising to her feet. "Are you going to stay down here?"

"Yes, I shall stay here," Richard replied.

The woman set off across the stream. Elisabeth was still singing. Richard could make out the words, she must have been sitting at the window, or leaning out of it. She was no longer singing the words of the children's song, though the tune was the same:

"After trouble, after sorrow,  
Will there be on earth some morrow  
When we two shall meet again?  
Floods are rising, flames are raging,  
Beating o'er me; past assuaging  
Are my helplessness and pain."

Richard wanted to call her name loudly into the night or softly up to her window. But the song was for her husband, not for him.

He buried his face in his hands, pressed his fingers into his ears and broke into weeping, just as he had done that morning when he had seen her leave the house for the river bank, step into the boat and be ferried across the water.

The landlady returned alone: the man across the river had mistaken his way, being in search of a village that did not lie on this side of the river.

288

Elisabeth was standing at her window. The landlady came from the boat and called:

“Aren’t you asleep yet?”

“I can’t sleep!” Elisabeth answered. “I’m coming downstairs to sit with you for a little while.”

Richard heard distinctly what she had said. He took the visitors’ book and wrote in it: “Tommy Schabeu, travelling from Hamburg to Lammsdorf.” Then he jumped up and hastily left the room. Meeting the landlady in the passage, he told her he was going for a walk.

A quarter of an hour later Elisabeth read what he had written. The landlady noticed how the colour left her face as she pushed the heavy book away with trembling hands and how her eyes remained fixed on it.

“Do you know him?” she inquired.

“Yes,” Elisabeth replied in confusion, her cheeks suddenly flushing crimson. The old woman turned a suspicious and questioning gaze upon her. She felt certain that there was something not quite right about it, but she could not guess what a struggle Elisabeth was waging with herself.

That she was and wanted to remain Frederick’s wife was clear to Elisabeth. She had learned the meaning of happiness, of living for others. The songs she sang sprang from her longing and tenderness. But her heart was weak and defenceless, and she knew well enough that happiness, living for others, the songs of longing and the soft resignations of tenderness did not make up all that there was in the realm of life. Did she not realise that these things could not give a true and complete picture of her real self? She, Elisabeth Zamell, had been what she was since her seventeenth year. Her first marriage had been deception—self-deception. This, her third, her marriage with Frederick Zurnieden, was deception too. Yes, she was deceiving him, and she would go on deceiving him her whole life through. She was eternally

Elisabeth Zamell. She had confessed to Richard that she was a bad and empty woman; she had told Frederick of this confession. Did her husband not understand what she understood, that she was a bad and empty woman? Why did he not believe her? Across the distance that divided them she called to him that Richard’s arrival was a good thing, because it put an end to a contradiction, the state of being a contradiction to herself. She believed that, but no one else would understand it. Masculine reason so easily

became contemptuous; masculine emotion so often ended in despair. A man could never understand the feelings of a distracted woman, or could understand only if understanding meant forgiveness. But why did not Richard let her see him? Why? She felt that he was standing behind the curtain, hiding from her. She knew that he wished to avoid her. That was well, at least well-meant. "Our village!" How horribly well-meant that was! Meant, only meant. But the really good must be something different, something which did not proceed from herself.

For she was bad. Frederick was much too good for her. Perhaps it would be best if she were to run away with one of the masons or carpenters, with the one who had the black, dreamy eyes. He was a stranger here, a wanderer. They would go away together and never come back. But her child, Eric's child? She had thought more and more about the child since she had betrayed Frederick into marriage, into a bond with him for eternity. That was the third bond into which she had entered. There were three eternities within her and each one obliged her to resist the others. But one of them would prove to be the strongest—which?

"What are you thinking about?" the landlady asked.

"Oh ... nothing ... do you know where he's gone?"

The woman looked up suspiciously. She shook her head

290

and continued to knit a stocking, murmuring: "Child, child!"

The words touched Elisabeth, for she knew only too well that she was no longer a child. A child would not be evil, but would remain good even in the presence of evil. She felt a sudden desire to weep and to call to Frederick that *her* village had ceased to exist, it had been burnt up within her. She recalled how Frederick had awakened her one night and said: "I only want you to prove to me that we are alive, that our village is not a dream nor our happiness a phantom of the brain. I have been dreaming of a bird with wings so wide that they stretched across the horizon. It was flying away with our village on its back. I tried to catch it and then I saw how tiny I was."

The landlady broke in upon her thoughts, remarking:

"It would be a good thing if he was never to come back again."

A tug with its string of barges passed down the river. The sound brought back memories of Frederick, and Elisabeth said to herself that a woman could give her soul to one man only. There was only one eternity. Second

marriage and free love, they were equally as much or as little. Where might Frederick be now? Would he be sleeping? Would he be able to sleep? The night was as light as the previous night had been. Frederick had remarked on it. Scarcely twenty-four hours had passed since then. "An August night." Why had he said that? What did he mean? He had said it a second time, too, just before she had fallen asleep. And in the next room, on the other side of the wall, Richard had been lying so near to them.

"Don't you know where he's gone?" Elisabeth asked once more.

The eyes of the landlady blazed back at her.

"You've no right to bother yourself about him," she

291

replied. "What's wrong with the fellow? Do you know him? He didn't look to me exactly trustworthy. It's time you went to bed. Your husband told me I was to see you went to bed in good time."

Suddenly she took Elisabeth's hand, her voice was tender:

"Come, child, I'll take you up to your room."

"Not yet, not yet!" Elisabeth replied, holding fast to the hand that had caressed her own. She clung to the old woman, who shook her head and said:

"I hope he'll never come back again. I'm sure it would be better if he didn't. So far as I'm concerned, let him drown himself in the river!"

"No, no, no!" Elisabeth cried out. "Don't say that!"

She would have said more, but was silenced by the eyes of the old woman, who rose to her feet. Her eyes seemed to pierce, to eat into Elisabeth.

Then a man's heavy step sounded outside the house. The night was still light; the river flowed noiselessly by and there was no wind to stir the poplars. The moon was full.

The footsteps were the ferryman's, returning from harvesting. He had been up-stream to lend his brother a hand: of an evening they threshed the rye—everything was early this year. As he came in he remarked that he had never seen such a moon: they ought to come out and look at it—it seemed to be floating up and down.

Why was Elisabeth frightened? Why did the landlady remain standing? "Come along," the man said—but neither of them moved.

Steps sounded outside. The ferryman had not yet closed the door, and he turned to see who was coming. It was a pedlar.

“Look, the moon is floating!” he exclaimed once more. “Come and look at it!”

292

His wife moved towards the door, holding Elisabeth’s hand.

“There’s thunder about,” the pedlar remarked. “It bodes no good. The world is doomed—I’ve dreamed it every night.”

Like a ball tossed up and down the moon vibrated above the horizon, partially hidden behind the hedge upon the dyke. Spellbound by this strange phenomenon they remained standing before the ferryhouse. Only the pedlar spoke, nervously and unceasingly. One oughtn’t to suppose, he said, that this meant nothing. It was a warning to the world. Nothing was immovable in space—great changes were about to happen. “Revolution!” he shouted, “revolution!” No doubt the fine gentry wouldn’t like the sound of that, but their ears would soon have to get used to quite different things. Did the young lady possess ears? Was she taking a summer holiday? Elisabeth heard nothing of what he was saying. The spectacle in the sky, caused by the exhalations of the over-heated earth, soon came to its accustomed end. After a few minutes the brilliant moon resumed its wonted quiet way around the mother earth.

Elisabeth’s sharp eyes had detected the man for whose presence she sought and prayed—Richard was approaching the ferryhouse, coming over the dyke from the south. She wanted to run towards him, but the landlady held her back. The ferryman was waiting at the door; the pedlar was already in the house.

Elisabeth was wearing a white summer dress which glowed like snow in the night. Richard saw it and stood still.

The ferryman called to her; he wanted to bolt the door. She hurried back into the house.

From the dyke a voice came:

“Wait! Wait! I am coming to you, Elisabeth!”

The first puff of wind stirred through the night. The

293

poplars began their uneasy murmur. A broad ripple moved over the river and chattered among the rushes; then came the tremulous music of the poplar leaves. The river quickened its movement towards the sea, as though



every drop of it were moved by sweet longing to meet the salt tears of disillusionment.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII

ELISABETH was reluctant to go upstairs. She remained sitting in the parlour with the landlady. The ferryman filled up the pedlar's glass; the latter kept talking as though his tongue dare not be silent for a moment. Presently he turned to Elisabeth and asked whether her husband was a doctor? "No," she answered. If he had been, the pedlar continued, he would have refused to sit at the same table with her; his foot had been so badly wounded by a shell in the War that he had had six operations. There were, he declared bitterly, no greater bunglers than doctors. He had formerly been an artisan but had given up work of that sort because he could no longer endure standing still; he preferred always to be wandering about. Besides, an artisan was called to account for every trifling mistake. But a doctor was allowed to bungle and to cure by killing without being held responsible for his mistakes and stupidities.

Then he asked whether Elisabeth's husband had been an officer. Her former husband had, she replied.

If he was dead, so much the better, the pedlar added.' He had nothing to say against the lady's former husband—but officers, well, he couldn't but laugh at them; they had had a fine life in the War, at the expense of the other ranks.

Perhaps her husband was a lawyer? No. Well, had she followed the Perlau case? The whole lot of them ought to have been hanged. Justice was nothing but a question of money. The laws were out of date. In the old days no judge would have dared to make decisions so casually.

Was her husband a "hot air merchant"?

Elisabeth asked what that might be.

295

A newspaper man, a writer of any sort of rubbish? The stuff they wrote was all bunkum, all lies. They'd take care to write the truth if they'd to walk about on wooden legs! Every one of these scribblers had to cudgel his brains for eight hours a day before he could turn out an article. One of these gentry had been concocting a beautiful story about the destitution in the burnt village yonder. But where was the destitution? The fat peasants were building houses and setting their dogs on the beggars who came near. There

wasn't a sign of destitution, and whoever had found the money for rebuilding the village knew well enough how to make a profit out of it. Let the rich help the rich and the devil take care of his own! But everything would soon be changed, ha ha! Or perhaps the lady didn't think so?

Elisabeth, who had at first found the man amusing, now felt frightened. The landlady was knitting, with wrinkled brow; the ferryman gazed meditatively at the oil lamp which hung from the ceiling. Did they not hear what the man was saying? Why did they not protect her against his impertinence? Why did they suddenly look so intent upon their work or thoughts?

The pedlar continued to chatter. The houses, he said, were badly built, the modern jerry-built affairs—rotten material, unseasoned timber, thin walls. But that didn't matter. The roofs would be falling in by the time the harvest was gathered, and serve the peasants right! Someone had told him that the houses had been paid for by a benevolent lady who understood nothing about building. Benevolence was the most vulgar thing in existence! The lady had paid for a church window too. Was it all true?

Elisabeth flushed hotly as the pedlar stared at her and proposed to show her his wooden leg. She jumped up and said good-night. The pedlar called something after her which, fortunately, she did not understand. The landlady nodded

296

silently as Elisabeth went past her. Only the ferryman wished her good-night.

She ran quickly up the stairs. Never had she felt so forlorn as now. She wanted to cry aloud in distress—a new, unwonted distress which pierced her heart like a knife.

“O God,” she whispered as she reached her room, “O God, let the village be burnt down! No, spare the village but break up the new houses before anybody occupies them. My money is evil, because I am evil. The path I have wanted to tread ... no, Frederick, it may be right for you, but for me it is madness. Only good people should try to do good works!”

She went to the window and leaned out. With an emotion of utter loneliness she called softly: “Come to me, Richard, come to me! I am going wrong, going astray. Help me!” Then she staggered to her bed and sat down. “Our village!” she cried scornfully. “Our village! Madness, nothing but madness!”

Once again she went to the open window. Beyond the river the village lay behind the dyke, its church roof glistening in the moonlight.

Wedded, for the third time, for the third eternity! She laughed in mockery. So that was happiness! That was the life she did not know! Her heart beat wildly, for was there not something beautiful in this life after all?

Then she wept—never before had she wept with such abandon. While her tears still flowed she stretched out her hands towards the far bank of the river, towards the village where she had lived and thought for others. She wept more helplessly, more hopelessly than before. All the while she could hear the voice of the pedlar downstairs rising in still greater excitement. What an odd creature he was, she thought. She guessed, she was certain, that he was speaking about her. He was reviling her—and rightly. No, no,

297

not rightly! She had meant well in what she had done, even when she made mistakes. True, she knew nothing of goodness—how could someone bad comprehend goodness and kindness I Eric had once said: “The time will come when you will know. Your heart and soul are now too indolent—you don’t understand what I say to you, what I shout into your ears. But the time will come.... I feel it ... the time will come!” She had called his words “moralizing,” but now they were like fire within her consciousness, like a fire which would consume the soul of which she denied the existence. For weeks past, ever since that night when the Recluse had appeared before her window and Richard had entered her life, something had been smouldering deep within her, a secret fire that was now beginning to blaze up. The flames were beating upon the rubbish-heap of her futile experiences, of her vain triflings with men and life.

“It is good that it burns,” she said. “I have waited long enough for it. Richard said there would be a day of reckoning—the usual drivel that Eric always had on the tip of his tongue! Reckoning? For what? What was wrong with me? Everything, everything! I am by nature evil. My soul is fundamentally bad. I don’t know what goodness is. How could I be good if I am totally unaware what that is? I am bad. Exactly. But one who is evil cannot do evil. The stupid don’t commit stupidities. The evil become evil when they want to do good: they only succeed in disfiguring goodness.”

The river lights seemed to her to shine with an unusual brilliancy. The moonlight was as warm and serene as when Frederick had still been there. How invigorating it was! The river murmured more noisily, the poplars

groaned, the ferryhouse was full of sound. The pedlar was shrieking curses upon the capitalism that marred the world. Was

298

he right? Was it true, what he said about *their* village being a fraud?

“I want no more of it!” Elisabeth exclaimed. “I am bad. The beautiful forms of goodness do not fit me. I want to be what I am—and I am a woman—Elisabeth Zamell, the dead Eric’s gay wife, a merry widow. Eric was in love with me. He wanted to love me. He loved to be in love. He longed to improve me. But I was strong. He needed to be stronger than I. He strove in vain against my strength. He was defeated because he attempted more than was within his power. That is what I am doing now—but I want no more of it—I will go back to being myself. Forgive me, Frederick. You wanted more from me, wanted to make something out of me. I, as I truly am, was not good enough for you. But other men love me just as I am—and I ...”—she stepped away from the window—“I am thirsty for life. I hate this loneliness—this box-room of mine, and the monotonous river. His village too—his! For I have no concern with it. Solitude and boredom are about me everywhere. There’s no escaping from the tiresome sound of the poplars. I will get away, away, away!”

She stepped to the window again. A tug wheezed and thudded upstream.

“It’s certainly lovely to look at,” she went on. “I like looking at it—but it is romanticism of the Zurnieden sort. At one point it leaves me quite cold, and that point is my heart. How can I love something that leaves my heart cold?”

The string of barges drew slowly by. Suddenly there was a sound of voices; a command, melancholy, long-drawn and harsh, was intoned from deck to deck. From the last barge but one a rope hummed through the air and clattered upon the deck of the last barge. The tug’s siren shrieked. Again there was shouting; and a long-drawn “All clear!”

299

from the last barge passed from deck to deck through the murmuring darkness. The last vessel, loaded with stone, sand and timber for the village, had been cast off from the convoy and was making for the river bank.

The ferryman went down to his boat and rowed across the river, to give a hand with making the barge fast to the landing-stage. Flares blazed out.

The stars shone brightly in the north.

There was a noise on the stairs; it startled Elisabeth and she pressed her hand against her breast, against her wildly beating heart. Was it Richard?

Then she heard voices. The landlady and the pedlar were speaking:

“The next door,” she was saying.

“Ah, then I’m to have a fine neighbour. Good night.”

He passed her door and entered the next room. Elisabeth had only one wall between her and the pedlar. A prisoner!

The landlady went downstairs, replaced the lamp in the parlour and walked out to wait for her husband at the river bank. From her bed Elisabeth could see the innkeeper returning across the river.

The house seemed to be full of noises. At one moment she thought she heard the pedlar talking, at the next she believed the sounds came from Richard’s room. She could not sleep. Her candle was lit, and she listened intently. There were sounds in the parlour; outside, nature seemed more animated than ever; the river murmured more loudly, the poplars shook in the wind. Only the river lights, untouched by the restlessness of nature, blinked in their accustomed way, yellow, green, red, short or long.

Once she was sure that someone called her name, but she dared not rise and go to the window, for she was afraid that someone would hear her. She thought of her child: all news from Lammsdorf was good, the boy was well and

300

happy. Every day either the manager or his wife visited him, and on Sundays they had him with them for the whole day. The factory was prospering. Everything, in short, went on in its appointed way. In the morning there would be a letter from Frederick, she thought. If only he were with her! Listen—*his* waterfowl were crying outside: those were the cries, so melancholy, so plaintive, that he loved to hear. “They used to cry like that on the Yser,” he had told her. “It was like that in Flanders for four long years!” And so she had called them *his* birds.

The innkeeper had returned, Elisabeth heard his voice. He and his wife were talking, but she could not distinguish their words. Once the pedlar laughed, but whether he were awake or asleep she did not know. He bumped against the wall.

Richard had not yet come in. The innkeeper and his wife were sitting downstairs, busied with the difficult task of writing to Herr Frederick

Zurnieden about his wife Elisabeth.

“He gave me strict instructions,” the landlady said, “I am responsible to him. He left me his address and fifty marks. ‘Take care,’ he said to me, ‘that nothing goes wrong.’ But I don’t want to have anything to do with it. You yourself heard what the pedlar said: that he could see at once she was an adventuress. I’ll write the letter if you don’t want to, but it would be much better for you to write. Here’s paper and ink—I’ve got everything ready—sit down and do it.”

The innkeeper wrote what his wife dictated. It was midnight before the letter was finished. They put it inside the visitors’ book; the postman would take it in the morning. They had no sooner finished than Richard came in and went straight up to his room. They had no cause for detaining him—they had stated in the letter that he was probably a tramp.

301

The innkeeper bolted the front door and followed his wife into the bedroom. They did not begin to talk again and the ferryhouse was soon in silence.

After a quarter of an hour the woman said to her husband, who had already dozed off:

“She still has a light in her room, I can see it shining on the poplars.”

Yes, her light was burning and she was sitting up in bed. For Richard was near to her, Richard the Schabeu, the reincarnation of Eric Zamell. And she was Elisabeth Zamell.

Three times she knocked lightly on the wall that divided them, but he did not answer. She knocked again—he made no reply. Then she dressed herself, taking care to make no noise. She chose the best garment she had with her, the blue silk dress that she had worn on her last night in Lammsdorf.

Once more she knocked. Listening intently, she thought she could hear a noise in his room. Her heart beat wildly when he knocked three times in answer.

She did not wait to put on her slippers but went to the door in stockinged feet and pulled back the bolt. The lock rattled, the door creaked and the floor-boards made a dreadful noise. Her face was set with determination; she felt compelled to go on, as though something were pushing her or drawing her. She was like a blazing fire—she wanted to burn and be consumed. She did not ask herself what was about to happen: she was

herself, Elisabeth Zamell, the merry widow, athirst for brightness, for the glare of lights, for music, for dancing and the creak of floor-boards beneath her tensely moving feet. Life she would have, by one means or another. But three more steps and she would be at his door.

She stifled in her throat a desire to laugh, to laugh at everyone and at herself. "Our village"—what a joke! And the river with its Zurnieden sort of romanticism!

302

This was now a Zamell sort of romanticism: to be in a blaze of fiery emotion.

Suddenly the whole house seemed to be alive with noises—above, below, everywhere. She sprang across the remaining distance—she would not be beaten. Let happen what might, she was Elisabeth Zamell.

The landlady awakened her husband.

"She's out of bed," she said. "The pedlar was quite right about her."

But her husband was aware that the ferryhouse was no house of prayer. Once, indeed, there had been a murder upstairs. So he turned over to his other side and said:

"Do you think I'm a child? Go to sleep."

But his wife did not sleep. What they had written in the letter was, she decided, nothing at all. First thing in the morning she would write to Herr Zurnieden that it was a clear case of adultery.

Elisabeth was at Richard's door. She lifted the latch and the door sprang open.

Before the open window stood the man in whose form Eric still lived.

303



## CHAPTER XXXIX

NOW there could be no turning back. Even had Frederick been standing on the landing, she would have cried to him that she must belong to the other man. Her word did not bind her. As to the promises she had given, Frederick was a poor fool ever to have believed them.

The door of Richard's room remained open. There were ten paces between him and Elisabeth, but emotionally no more than once pace.

That the landlady downstairs was listening, that the wandering pedlar was strapping on his wooden leg so to creep nearer and hear how these fine folk lived—such human considerations did not exist for her. She had become an animal, beautiful in colour and lovely in form. She stood there, intent upon the goal before her, the portals behind which her world awaited her. Nothing could restrain her, nothing could prevent her—she was a woman who had broken out of her prison.

"I am here!" she breathed.

He did not answer. Outside, the river rushed past more noisily. The poplars bent before the wind. The draught blew the door to with a crash. The listeners outside were defeated.

The rigid form by the window moved. Richard or Eric?—these words, she now realised, were like a law which she was bound to obey.

"I am here!" she breathed again.

There was no answer. But the form glided along the wall, and it was Eric Zamell who approached her—his haggard face, his mouth which had said: "The time will

304

come when you will understand." His were those eyes, his eyes when he had broken into a cry: "I die unsatisfied!"

"I am here!" Elisabeth shrieked. "I am here!"

Where was her determination now? Where was the lithe animal in all the abandonment of newly won freedom? Through the ferryhouse, round which a gale now raged, her shriek rang wilder and more piercing, like a cry for help against the impenetrable chaos of the world: "I am here!"

How the storm raged! She seemed to see a yellow motorcar flashing through the air, leaping high over the horizon towards the moon that hung

above the south. Then the car changed its course, leaving a trail that blazed and smoked in the ether. The storm drove ragged clouds across the plain. The yellow car tried to encircle the moon, but, mistaking direction, crashed into its face, which seemed to have Eric Zamell's features, distorted with sorrow for Elisabeth: his mouth which had said "One day you will understand" and his eyes with their horrible expression of unassuaged desire.

Wet branches, swollen with moisture, were torn from the poplars, and leaves were driven light as snow across the river. The surface of the water, broken by white-capped waves, rose and fell like a deeply breathing bosom. The windows rattled. The decaying timbers in the roof groaned. Every door shuddered, and a tile, blown from the roof, crashed down upon the landing-stage.

"Not satisfied," said the landlady, choosing her words with deliberation, "with questioning me so surprisingly about the man Tommy Schabeu, no sooner do we retire to our rest than she secretly hunts him out, goes into his room just at the top of the stairs, while a convenient storm does its best to help her by preventing us from hearing their carryings-on!"

305

Upstairs the pedlar crept back into his room.

"Curse my luck!" he exclaimed. "That would have been a tasty bit for me!" The noise of the storm drowned his words. The organ of the sky vibrated; only the drumroll of thunder was missing; all the pipes and horns were in full blast.

"Richard," Elisabeth moaned, kneeling on the floor, "Richard, where are you?"

Only the cries of wild-birds flying across the face of the moon answered her. The candle went out. Utter blackness enfolded the world, the night was an abyss.

"Richard! Richard!" she whimpered.

The river lights blinked like the glowing eyes of a wild animal—red, green, yellow, long or short; they seemed to call up before her eyes the shadows of the past, sorry fragments of a vanished time, a wild company of wasted hours and misspent days flashing by her. "Why don't you satisfy me, Elisabeth? Why don't you live for me? You are a light woman, and you glory in your lightness; beautiful of body, and you let every man see it. Have you no idea what poverty of soul is? The darkness within you drives

you on. The poets of darkness are your religion—indefinite and irresponsible. That is your attitude to yourself—uncertainty in everything: a pliant reed that bends to every wind. You cannot bear plain-speaking, you shrink from a stern glance, but your heart is hard as stone and colder than ice. I shout it into your ears!”

“Richard!” Elisabeth called.

She saw her child, her son Robert, standing by the window and regarding her with disillusioned eyes which seemed to say: “You have betrayed me. You have given me no guidance. Inwardly and outwardly you have taught me to tread the path that you tread. You have spoilt my heart, my spirit. A mother should point out the dangers in life.

306

Woe to the child whose mother fails it! And woe to her when her children become wiser than she! Then they curse her—and I ...”

“Robert!” Elisabeth shrieked at the vision before her. It faded. Red light suffused the window—formless, tumultuous light. The storm howled and raged.

Not for years had the plain experienced such weather. At two o’clock the innkeeper was awakened by his wife. The wind was still boisterous. The man arose, heavy and weary-limbed. The days were hard for him. But autumn was approaching—soon winter would be back again. Then he would sit beside the stove and take life more easily.

He had risen in good time. Bells were sounding from across the river. Lanterns were signalling from the barge, which was laden with stone, timber and sand. He could guess why: the barge lay deep in the water and the waves were beating into it. Help was needed. He set off across the river, and noticed that a light was showing in one of the upper rooms of the house. He saw a form moving about. What was it his wife had been telling him? Wasn’t it something about the Zurnieden lady in the tramp’s room? Yes, he could see two shapes now. Embracing? No, they were crossing; now they were separated, now they were together again, passing backwards and forwards. They must have known what they were doing, he thought. It was not his business—the hard pull across the rough water needed all his attention.

“Be quiet,” Richard was saying. “I mean to have my own way. Please don’t complain. And forgive me if I have to avoid meeting your glance. I dare not look at you. It is hard for me, so help me. Go back to your room—

leave me alone, I beg you. I demand that you obey me. Stop wandering about. In the morning we'll go over to your village. I will help you with your work—it shall be

307

properly carried out, I promise you. Now go and sleep, Elisabeth!”

“How good you are!” she said, placing herself in his way. He avoided her. She held out her hands to him, but he refused to see them.

Then she wished him good-night in a toneless voice. “Good night,” he answered, “take the candle with you.” She went back to her room and sobbed.

Richard, the reincarnation of Eric, now raised himself to his full height. His face, convulsed with pain, looked upwards. He closed his eyes so that he might see her head and outline again. From his mouth, distorted with anguish, broke a cry: “How beautiful!” and his arms opened to empty space.

“Elisabeth, Elisabeth! I recognize the confusion of the world. I was born to be lonely! But desire for you burns within me, desire for fulfilment. For you, a completely satisfying you!”

Then he fell upon the bed, buried his face in the pillow and, racked by longing, beat his head against it. He moaned her name, but faintly, so that she should not hear. Not long did he remain thus. Soon he sprang from the bed with a determined face and seeing eyes. His forehead frowned, his lips curled upwards with indignation. “Why did you come to me, Eric Zamell? Why have you taken possession of me, burning for fulfilment?” But his indignation was in vain. An empty world grinned back at him. The grimacing mask of days to come stared at him.

He laid himself on the disordered bed and closed his eyes: sleep might come upon him unawares. But within his eyes the pulsing blood kindled brightly coloured visions: Elisabeth soaring over the streets of Lammsdorf like a poisoned arrow, but beautiful, wonderfully beautiful. From the pavement in front of the police-station she was coming across the square

308

directly towards him. This time their ways did not meet, for ahead of him was Frederick, into whose arms she fell. Bride and bridegroom! Devil take the vision!

Twigs rattled against the window-panes. In the adjoining room Elisabeth was weeping. Richard stood up. He could not bear to let her weep. He would go to her, take her head in his hands, kiss her, kiss her, draw her to him and press her against his heart until she called: "Eric, Eric!"

Then he heard her voice distinctly. She had called: "Richard, Richard!" He sprang up. But his spirit was weak. He felt, as acutely as if a knife had cut into him, that he must hesitate awhile, must restrain his impetuous heart lest ... ah, he knew it! He laughed shrilly—an unsuppressed laugh of pain. For she had already called: "Frederick!" He pressed his hands to his ears and bit into the pillow, shutting his eyes tightly. It was as dark as when she had come down that staircase with her lover. What nonsense the fellow had talked in his effort to calm and reassure her! But he, Richard Tommsen, had succeeded. He, Tommy Schabeu, had taken her hand, her delicate little hand.

Suddenly he cried: "I can't exist without you, Elisabeth!"

The river roared wildly by. The windows rattled. The ferryhouse creaked and groaned. Everything, men and stones, souls and wood, writhed beneath the violence of the night.

Then came that spectre which surprises the weak but avoids the strong. It sprang upon Elisabeth's body, clinging astride her with lean hands clutching at her breast. She did not shake herself free as it grasped at her heart in wild desire. The terror of its greenish eyes held her spellbound. She saw a willow that hung over the river, and the grass around was trampled flat. Her feet were wet, her hair was damp. Her body, pressed against Richard's, shook with the cold. He fastened a rope around them both. Strength blazed from

309

his eyes as he grasped her head and sought her mouth. Beneath his powerful kisses she trembled with emotion. Now her feet could no longer feel the ground beneath her. He was carrying her with him, and they soared through the air. They fell. Water splashed about them. The icy river of death roared around them.

She knocked three times on the wall. There came no answering sound—she knocked again.

Richard clenched his fists till the joints of his hands cracked. "Knock but once more and I will shatter the wall! I will break down everything that divides us, beloved, beloved!"

But Elisabeth did not knock again. She stared into the night and saw a light that moved in the sky, climbing up and up from the earth. "Not the moon," she said, "not the moon, but a drunken star!"

Richard groaned, defenceless against his pain.

By four o'clock it was light. On the far bank of the river there was movement. The villagers had been awakened and were carrying stone and timber to land—only just in time to save the barge from sinking, for they could not pump out fast enough the water which the waves continually drove into it.

Richard dressed himself. Across the river there was life—and work. He rowed himself over, the boat tossing in the rise and fall of the waves. Elisabeth watched with wildly beating heart.

In the next room the pedlar was dreaming about the War. Again his foot was shot away, again he underwent the operation—once, twice, five times—and always at the hands of the same doctor whom he could not bear, so repulsive was his face. He felt that they were opponents, open enemies: how could recovery be possible? First it was his foot, then below the knee, then the knee, and then the

310

thigh. He cried aloud—he wanted to be taken to another hospital. And as it had been in the War, so was it now in his dream. Suddenly another doctor stood before him and said: "My lad, we must operate once more—but it will be the last time. What are you? Silversmith? Really!" It was the next patient's turn. "Very well, early to-morrow," the doctor said. "But what is to-morrow?" the pedlar cried in his sleep. A hospital nurse, a man-woman, laughed at him. "To-morrow is slaughter-day," she said. To the right of him was a bed whereon a dead man lay. One nurse remarked to another: "I've quietened him with the syringe." The pedlar cried out in his sleep: "This creature decides for life or death!"—and then he awoke. He banged against the wall. It was intended for Elisabeth, since she resembled the creature in the War hospital.

Downstairs the landlady was writing to Herr Zurnieden. She had pondered the matter very carefully and was describing the iniquities which she believed to have taken place. Ten years before, when her husband had been helping his brother with the harvesting, a stranger had come to the ferryhouse, and, like Elisabeth, she had gone to his room. At that time she had been still young, or if not exactly young, still full of unrest and

passionate desires. She knew well enough how such things happened—her face burned at the recollection. The ink was a poison which to-morrow she would inject into Frederick's heart.

Upstairs the pedlar turned over noisily in his sleep. He was dreaming of peace again, of the days and nights with his wife. They wrangled, for his nerves were in disorder and everything was a burden to him. His wife lacked understanding of him. She was athirst for life, longed for dancing and gaiety, longed to be anywhere, in fact, where life was fuller, gayer and freer. She could not bear to be at home in the workroom where her neurotic husband moped, no

311

longer fashioning with serene and loving hands, as once he had done, the resisting silver to pure forms of art. One midday—it was in summer-time—she came home, bringing the freshness of her youth, stepping from the sunshine into the gloom of his workroom. She went over to the window to open it. The mere sight of her in her radiant health was enough to make him shriek at her. She flew into a temper. Bitter words passed between them. Then, when he tried to strike her, she ran away, jeering at his wooden leg, taunting him with his inability to catch her.

Her bodily robustness increased as his own lessened. He ceased to work and longed to get away from her when she taunted him a second time with his physical disability. (It had been at a dance where he had tried to play the strong and masterful husband.) He sought a separation but she had given him no valid ground. What was a wounded soul? There was nothing in the laws, the judge remarked, which provided for such a plea. Then he tried to obtain a divorce, but without money he was bound to fail; and with a wooden leg he could not attract any girl who was looking for a lover.

So he began to wander about the country-side. He hated the wife who had deceived him and laughed at him. His heart shook at the sight of her, his mind reeled whenever he heard her voice. For she had scorned him with that which he had loved most in her, with the freshness of her youth, with the passion of her lithe body.

The pedlar sat up in bed and knocked against the wall. He meant it for Elisabeth, in whose figure and movements he saw a likeness to his wife. He cursed her loudly.

Elisabeth was terrified and pressed her hands to her ears.

312

## CHAPTER XL

THE birds were crying in the dawn. The fiery, blood-coloured disc of the sun climbed up from the horizon and storm-clouds raced across the sky. The men were working desperately to save the barge, which had sprung a leak. A derrick had broken loose in the wind and spars had smashed the aft starboard rigging. Richard and the innkeeper were attempting to stop the leak, but the waves beat down time after time their laboriously contrived repairs.

The postman brought Elisabeth a letter from Frederick; he wrote in words that burned with gratitude and happiness; he asked for news of her and of their village. The same postman carried away the letter which the landlady had written.

A little before ten o'clock the barge sank. Elisabeth was watching at her window and cried out in alarm. Then the pedlar came back with the news that one of the bargees had been injured and that both his legs were crushed. "Wooden legs!" the pedlar shrieked. "Wooden legs! Better far be dead!" At half-past eleven it was reported that one of the new buildings in the village had collapsed during the night and that the roof of another was expected to give away at any moment.

Elisabeth ate nothing at midday. Richard had not yet returned.

At two o'clock the innkeeper came back, bringing the corpse of a carpenter who had fallen from a house and been killed. Elisabeth was standing on the landing-stage; terrified at the sight of the dead body, she rocked upon her feet as though she would faint. The unfortunate carpenter was the man with the dark and dreamy eyes, the stranger who was wandering the countryside. She recalled that she had taken

313

particular notice of him: that in itself had been enough to bring a curse upon him!

She decided to cross over to the village and visit the overseer, who had sent a message asking her to come. The landlady ferried her over without speaking a word. The storm had somewhat abated but the landscape had become autumnal in a single night; the air was cold and raw. Elisabeth



made up her mind to go away as soon as possible, to-morrow or the day after. She had a longing to see her child again.

The village was silent when she came to the building which had collapsed in the night. She passed on to the overseer's house, where she was shown into the sitting-room and told that he would come to her almost immediately; but she had to wait nearly a quarter of an hour. While she waited she realised that the past night had plunged her life back into the misery from which she had seemed once and for all to have emerged. The village no longer interested her, her thoughts were with Richard and with her child. Frederick was far, far away from her: his letter meant nothing to her now, she did not want to answer it.

The overseer came at last. He told her—ah, she had long known it!—that the cause of the disaster was, in the opinion of an expert, bad building material, partially at least, but that ... Elisabeth interrupted him:

“I know. The accursed money is to blame. Don't tell me any more about it—it's all the same to me now. But, whatever happens, I want you to believe that I meant nothing but good.”

Her eyes filled with sudden tears. The overseer, a simple peasant, was at a loss what to make of it all. Her words were meaningless to him.

“The expert,” he went on, embarrassed by the presence of a weeping woman, “has examined the building plans. He found faults in the construction. However ....

314

Elisabeth, suddenly attentive, exclaimed that her husband and she had been taken in. Her husband had himself said so before he went away. But what was to be done now? She meant to go away too. Perhaps she would depart early the next morning.

The overseer answered that he had already been told that the expert was to superintend, on her behalf, the completion of the building, to direct the work, even to take over from him, the foreman, the business details, the control of the money, payment for materials and so on. But this expert was a stranger to him. He knew nothing about him, and was anxious to introduce him to her, so that she might then be in a position to put matters in order.

Elisabeth was completely unconcerned. She merely listened while the overseer told her that he no longer desired to have any part in the affair and

would gladly hand the business over to someone else, so that he might escape the ill-luck which seemed to attend the whole undertaking.

Where was this expert? Elisabeth asked. An arrangement with him would suit her admirably, as she wanted to go away. But it would distress her if the homeless families were to face the winter without roofs over their heads.

The expert, the overseer replied, was at that moment in the next room, busied over the building plans. Would Frau Elisabeth care to go in and see him?

“Yes,” she replied.

“His name is Schabeu,” the overseer added.

Elisabeth was unable to rise to her feet. The overseer, taken aback that she did not follow him, turned round and asked whether he should bring the man to her—there was no need for her to move.

“Please,” she said.

A strange mood took possession of her: she felt oddly comfortable and at home in the room. A diffused emotion

315

stirred delicately in her heart: “our village” would after all be completed. There was, in spite of everything, a foundation for her happiness. What was good in intention must remain good in fact—in spite of everything!

For a few seconds the soft and tender music of this feeling sounded within her. Then there was a clatter upon the flagstones of the hall—someone called her name; the front door and that of the adjoining room were opened simultaneously. From one side came Richard, followed by the grey-haired overseer, from the other her landlady with a telegram.

All three stood before her and looked at her apprehensively while she tore open the telegram with trembling hands. The message—she felt she had been expecting it—ran: “Robert seriously ill advise immediate return,” followed by her manager’s name.

The world seem to collapse about her ears. Something had been bound to happen, the landlady thought, shaking her head knowingly. Richard picked up the telegram which had slipped from Elisabeth’s hands after she had read it a second and a third time. She did not speak. White-faced, she stood at the window looking up at the clouds. She clasped her hands. Her heart was quaking No, it must not, it could not happen! Robert was still alive and would remain alive!

“The next train is a little before midnight,” the overseer remarked.

Elisabeth stepped back from the window and looked at Richard with staring eyes. He glanced away from her.

The landlady offered to bring the ferryboat to the landing-stage at eight o’clock. Should she arrange for a conveyance? Yes, that would be the best thing; she was to make arrangements immediately.

Elisabeth now composed herself. The overseer wanted

316

to introduce Richard, but she waved the introduction smilingly aside. Richard, with an expressionless face, quickly left the room: but in the hall a spasm of pain distorted his mouth, a feeling of suffocation contracted his throat. He staggered along the passage to the front door and out into the street.

Clouds were still drifting across the sky, but the wind had moderated its violence. Beside the church Richard met one of the carpenters, with whom, he recalled, he had once lodged in the same house in Hamburg. Together they went to the village hall.

“Yes,” Elisabeth said simply, “Herr Schabeu is free to do whatever he thinks right.”

Richard came back into the room. He had found a man, one of the carpenters, who would go to the post-office. Would Frau Zurnieden care to send a wire to her husband? He had no money in his pocket, or he would offer ... and besides, he did not know Herr Zurnieden’s address.

Elisabeth agreed to what he had suggested. She was amenable to any proposal. As soon as the carpenter had gone with the telegram she inquired about the injured bargee.

“He is at the point of death,” the overseer replied.

The words pierced Elisabeth’s heart like an arrow. What was to happen now? Disaster encompassed her. She would go to the injured man, kneel by his bed and ... then she heard Richard speaking. His words burned more fiercely than all the fires of her distress and helplessness: “Men die easily. Desires die hard!” She sprang up, determined to go to her child, to hurry to the railway, away from this place where everything was in disaster.

The overseer left the room. Elisabeth and Richard were alone. Someone ran by in the street. She started in fright—

317

every sound jarred her. The church bells began to ring. What was to happen now?

She fled from the window to the darkest corner of the big comfortable room; it had seemed till to-day almost like home to her. But that was all done with and the memory of it distressed her. She had been so often with Frederick in this very corner. It was here that her plans had taken shape, her generous plans of helping the unfortunate. It had all been a ridiculous business, a madness and a delusion. The wish to become good and benevolent had been a piece of utter foolhardiness.

The ground upon which the structure of her happiness was built had been undermined. The foundations had split and been shattered like glass; the whole edifice—nobility of mood, hope, serenity, love, joy and marriage—was tottering. Everything was crashing to ruin. Did not Frederick feel that too? The foundations had been too weak to bear the load of an evil woman: he had not thought of that—he had thought only of himself.

Already the twilight was falling, greyer and greyer. The details of the room were muffled in the evening shadows. This was the hour that Eric had loved, the hour when the too vivid colours of the day were softened. “Twilight is home-coming,” he had used to say, “a preparation for the eternal night.” Autumn had been the season he had cared for most. And now it was already autumn again, the first long twilight. Elisabeth cowered in the darkest corner of the room, wedged between wall and stove. She feared the twilight—the darkness terrified her. She wanted no homecoming, no preparation for the eternal night. She was afraid of eternity. For years past she had secretly delighted in every denial of soul and eternity, of God and the hereafter: in that way she had tried to put her mind at ease. But she herself had never expressed agreement with such opinions;

318

indeed, when such things had been said in her presence she had raised her eyebrows questioningly, thus leaving for herself a way of retreat from the denial. Yet in the company of men who affirmed that life was extinguished in death she had always been more sure of her value and continuity. No one had approved her and her life so much as such men. No one had acknowledged her beauty so fully as they. What she had done and what she had left undone had been equally right in their eyes. Her desires were her soul, as they had seemed to know; but since they had asked nothing of her they were not to know the extent of her desires. That had been their own

fault. Yet it had been wonderful to feel, in their presence, that her soul was unfettered, despite all ties. From such a feeling, she supposed, must come the inspiration of the poets, glorifying the inconstant and paltry emotions of desire and life.

Just before sunset the bank of clouds divided and for a few minutes an unexpected glow of light, ruddy and brilliant, steeped the earth and sky in fire. Richard's silhouette stood out sharply against the wild light, his back turned to Elisabeth.

"Richard," she called softly.

He seemed not to have heard her.

Footsteps approached. The overseer returned with the news that the unfortunate bargee had just died. Elisabeth wept and no one tried to comfort her. The sounds of an accordion came from somewhere in the village. The overseer went on to say that the bargee had left a wife and child. Elisabeth thought of her own child and wept more wildly.

Then she heard Richard's voice. He was talking business with the overseer: the money which Frau Zurnieden had set aside for the new houses was, in his opinion, in excess of the sum to which the building costs would amount, if the

319

work were carried out with reasonable economy. The surplus, some hundreds of marks, could be handed over to the bargee's widow.

Elisabeth wanted to shout "No."

Then she heard him say what he was proposing was in accordance with Frau Zurnieden's wishes.

She wanted to cry "No" still more emphatically, but she could only weep the more bitterly. What Richard was doing was right and proper. She listened while the overseer told her that the bargee was from a neighbouring village and that there had been mishaps in many parts of the river during the past night. Not far away huge trees had been uprooted; the roof of an old farmhouse had been blown off by the storm, falling upon a barn and burying cattle beneath it. Not for a hundred years had such a storm been known in that part of the country.

The words were like balm to her wounded heart; no longer did there seem to her to be a curse only upon her village. The harshness and bitterness of the hour passed away.

At eight o'clock the landlady was waiting for Elisabeth and saw her approaching hand in hand with Richard. They were so brazen about it that not for a moment did they release hands, even in the landlady's presence. Side by side they sat in the boat, went together to Elisabeth's room, took their meal together and set off together in the carriage for the station. Elisabeth scarcely bothered to wish the landlady good-bye.

The carriage was open to the stars. "I don't understand what is happening to us," Elisabeth said, "but there is one thing I do know: some day I shall call to you. I shall call for your help. Will you come to me then?"

"Haven't you asked someone that once already?"

320

"I asked Frederick, when Eric died. Why should I deny it? I feel that Frederick is dead in me."

"No!" Richard cried sharply. "I am building your village."

Elisabeth was crying. Richard flung back his head. Stars. Stars. Up in the sky there burned the message that fulfilment was renunciation. Earthliness had to be conquered. Eternity could not be entangled in earthly happiness: from that only unhappiness could come, unhappiness, deception and guilt. "Desires do not die."

The horse moved at an even pace through the summer-autumn night. Summer was over and autumn had not yet arrived. It was the turn of the season; the branches of the fruit trees were weighed down with their load, and the fruit was falling before the sun had ripened it.

They passed through villages where dogs barked and cocks crowed at midnight, but human beings were asleep. Only here and there light shone from a cottage where perhaps someone lay ill.

Elisabeth had not ceased weeping. She leaned against Richard, and the delicate odour of her hair caressed his senses. He buried his hands in the cushions and looked up at the stars. He was recalling that cry of Eric Zamell's: "Fulfilment! Fulfilment will happen yet!" But the stars told him how far off was the goal towards which all his desire was straining.

At the station neither of them spoke. A handshake, nothing more. But their hearts were bleeding and aching to cry out.

321

## CHAPTER XLI

HER son lay delirious in fever. For three whole days she did not leave his bedside. But on the fourth day the fever was over; the child laughed again and Elisabeth at length could sleep.

No word came from Frederick. Days came and went. Elisabeth wrote three times to her husband, but received no answer. The days became weeks, and then at last one afternoon he suddenly stood before her. His face frightened her: it had become old and careworn. She questioned him—he made no answer: he treated her as once she had treated him. In the afternoon they sat together in the drawing-room; he pulled some letters from his pocket, perhaps a dozen of them, and silently handed them to his astonished wife.

She read them one by one: the landlady's allegations, the evidence of witnesses. From each the verdict was unmistakable: guilty.

She was about to defend herself when Frederick stood up. Speaking quietly, he ordered her to remain silent. There was but one thing he would ask of her, that she answer truthfully the questions he meant to put to her.

The lamps were being lit in the street outside. Elisabeth had gone over to the window. Frederick stepped close to her and took her hand.

"Tell me," he said with trembling lips, "do you love him?"

"I don't know," she whispered.

"Tell me," he asked, breathing deeply, "whether you can live without me."

"I can live without you," she replied and began to cry.

322

He pulled a paper from his pocket. "I'll put the light on, then you must read this."

He switched the light on, and Elisabeth read the paper. At first she could not understand what was written on it. Then it became clear to her: it was a petition, in her name, for divorce on the grounds of his adultery. He was taking the blame upon himself. To-morrow the term would begin in the Lammsdorf courts.

"You are to be free again," he said. "I promised my friend, Eric Zamell, that I would protect you. I wanted to make you happy. I know that I cannot

succeed——no, don't thank me. The hardest part for me is over—it was my adultery. But it's over, and it happened of my own free will. Also I have returned to my official post—I was allowed to withdraw my resignation. There is one human circumstance in which—forgive my bitterness—I seem to be indispensable: that is my official position, not my marriage—according to a few people who believe me to be honourable and conscientious.”

On the following day the Zurnieden marriage was formally dissolved after the minimum of investigation. That same day, while beneath the mild autumn sun a light mistiness gave to the horizon a tint of blue, Elisabeth and Frederick climbed up to the cemetery. They visited Eric's grave and covered it with flowers.

Then they took the rising path which led across the hills, the path which Frederick had followed with his dead friend on the day of his first arrival in Lammsdorf. The two talked in the manner of comradeship. Frederick remarked: “Your village, Elisabeth, is in being. From seven houses nine more have arisen.”

She did not answer. Her face was very pale; her eyes looked into the distance. A train thundered through the

323

valley. The leaves of the trees were already yellow or red. In the town below bells began to ring: to-morrow would be a holiday. The smoke from the stack of the Zamell soap factory rose straight as a candle in the air.

They glanced at the train which was proceeding towards Bestfeld.

“I wonder,” Elisabeth said, “whether you still remember how, in the night after Eric's death, before you went away, you came to me on the balcony? A train was passing through the valley—I can hear the sound of it yet!”

“Yes, I know,” Frederick answered. “I recall it clearly. The train had been gone a long while.”

“I could hear it the whole night, until it reached Hamburg. Richard went away in it.”

Then Frederick told her about the man on the landing and the other happenings of that long past day. Elisabeth grasped his hand.

“I am afraid,” she whispered.



In defiance of his reason an emotion of sympathy, heart-rending and passionate, possessed him. He wanted to take her in his arms, to protect her, to comfort her. But he would not meet her eyes; his own glanced across the valley, over the roofs and towers of Lammsdorf. He thought of his dead friend and of all that had happened since the day when they had walked over the hill together. It was then that Eric had said to him: "Elisabeth lacks the strength of will and of conviction which is necessary if she is to change. She wants to be helped and supported; but she needs, too, to be strengthened inwardly. Life had made of her a sort of soldier who obeys the world blindly; and she turns to me only when the world has no commands to give her. Such she will be for years to come, perhaps for her whole lifetime."

With a strong, unfaltering hand-clasp, with a look that concealed all his pain and misery, Frederick tore himself

324

free from her and hurried down the pathway towards the station.

Such was his farewell to Elisabeth and to Lammsdorf. It was already dark and autumnally chilly when the late afternoon express carried him away.

325

## CHAPTER XLII

THE houses were completed. Ten buildings replaced the seven which had been burnt down. October had come, but the mists were already so heavy that the days were as short as in midwinter. It was Richard's last evening at the ferryhouse. Outside, the trees were bare of foliage and the rain was falling steadily. For the last time he lit the candle; the flickering light barely illumined the damp room. His eyes stared for a long time at the uncertain flame. The asthmatic village clock was striking midnight.

For days past he had been meaning to write but had sought inarticulately to find words that would express his thought and feeling.

He had hours which were as wild as the wind that stripped the leaves from the trees, hours when he felt that he was born to be himself alone and entirely, when Elisabeth's sighs and tears were nothing to him, when her beauty lost for him its uniqueness. She was then a thousandfold insignificant to him; and he was conscious of an inner law which held him to his hard and relentless destiny. But his face was not to betray even the bitterest pain he suffered. Whether he would or not, he was compelled not to die of sorrow but, rather, of a happiness which dared not face eternity. He lived in loneliness; he was bound to live in loneliness. And so he would live, for his soul was self-contained.

He had hours, too, which shattered all his supple strength, hours when the desire for fulfilment devoured him inwardly, like a worm in a fruit. From the uncertain light

326

of an autumn day there rose before him the image of Elisabeth, frivolous and lustful for the tinsel pleasures of life. Then in the twilight the warmth of the earth streamed about him, hot and heavy, drawing his heart with its intoxicating magic.

He had hours when all his strength was drowned in hot impatience, when a feeling of spiritual or bodily crisis enraptured or crushed him. Then for days at a time he had to wander along the high roads and through the neighbouring villages, until a premonition of something miraculous drew him back to the ferryhouse.

And there were times when he longed for music and dance. Wild nights were those, while he tried to drug his heart and to sell his soul with forgetfulness. Then, when across the chords of his being there thrilled that song to which Eric, his spiritual brother, his twin mind, had cried *da capo*, he enlivened town and village with his tempestuous gaiety. His quest for fulfilment seemed to have become so simple: to seek it was to find it. Yet a conviction remained in him that out of ten hopes nine must be set aside if one of them were to be fulfilled; and the next morning he would realise his failure, for nothing could be more deadly than the little fulfilments.

For days past he had wanted to write but had found no words to express his thought and feeling. The candle flared up unsteadily. He stared at it for a long time. The asthmatic village clock sounded the first hour of a new day. This was the day of his departure, for the houses were finished and already occupied. His task was now over. At his wish the overseer had written to Elisabeth to say that the work was completed. A statement concerning the cost of each building—materials, wages and all other expenses—was enclosed with the letter.

Richard did not write during this night. Soon after one

327

o'clock his eyelids began to drop. Sleep came and he had a dream:

He descended from the train at Lammsdorf and wandered up the street, passing townwards along the Langenstrasse and across the market-place. He turned aside into a lane that ran behind the town hall. There he saw Elisabeth with a man whose coat collar was turned up, for it was cold and windy. He looked and saw that it was he himself who walked beside her. The two turned round at the upper end of the lane and came back towards him. Her face was very pale, her head bent thoughtfully forward. She wore no hat, but an evening cloak was around her shoulders as though she had been to the theatre or to a party. She and her companion did not speak; but half-way down the lane they stood still, just where a smaller lane turned off towards the market. The man, who was Richard Tommsen, seemed to catch sight of him and laughed, just as one laughs at seeing an acquaintance who has been long away. Then Elisabeth saw him.

"Surely," she exclaimed, "surely that's Tommy Schabeu who built my houses! How thin he has become!"

"Yes," the man replied, "he spends too much time drinking and dancing in the villages. He can stand that sort of life as little as I can stand your own

behaviour. It's your body that I love, Elisabeth, but he is after the soul which you don't possess. You must understand, he's got a 'fulfilment' complex. You need only move your hand and he'll say that you've fallen a victim to the world's tinsel and sham. At times he experiences a sort of self-revelation. Then he decides upon renunciation. He means to renounce his desire for you, but he renounces himself, his innate character, instead. Then he sees you as you are. A thousand women live before his eyes; he sees them bloom and wither; he sees them come and go; but they mean nothing to

328

him. It is only you he sees, and in you he experiences the fate of the century which, he believes, is being formed within your womb, in you he lives through the coming time when youth will have lost the mother-feeling, when old age will die childless, when mankind will be lonelier and lonelier, when the delusion of a social community will be shattered and self-deception will have lost its last delight. Even now despair has become the foster-mother of all endeavour."

"How sad!" Elisabeth exclaimed. "That sort of thing has always upset me and I don't want to hear about it. It is Eric's soul that speaks from him."

"Rather, an age long vanished," the man replied. "That is his misfortune; he knows that the old things are shattered, but does not guess how or whereby the new things will come about. He has two souls which are in conflict day and night; they watch each other jealously: one soul loves you as you are, the other loves you as his feelings would have you be. When one looks at you the other endures torture, and when the other believes in you the first is hurt about it. The one is afraid that you are able to become what the other desires you to be; and the other is afraid that you will remain as you are."

"That's dreadful!" Elisabeth interrupted. "I'm so sorry for Tommy!"

"At present he renounces you—but you know well enough how he does it. Every night he sends me to you: I have to feel your presence, your heart, your breath, your face. I have to report what you say, be ever beside you so that you may not fall a victim to other men. I have to be with you when you go visiting or to the theatre. When you dress or undress I must stay beside you, and when you sleep at night. Every hour he calls to me to know what you are doing and how you are, whether you are sad or cheerful, reading or dreaming, sleeping or awake. I have to tell him

everything, even when it makes him suffer. He is saying now that he has lost touch with himself. Yes, he is pulling me back to him now. I must go! He is calling, impatient to ask me questions which I should not like to tell you about. Good-bye, Elisabeth. I love you.”

The man took his departure, and Elisabeth hurried away with quick steps through the side lane towards the marketplace and across it. She ran in the direction of the Langenstrasse. Richard followed her. Before No. 24 she stopped and called his name. There was a light in the third-floor room which he had occupied as Frau Krafft's lodger. Elisabeth called again: he heard his name distinctly. Now a window was opened and a man's head appeared, asking what she wanted. Instead of answering she ran quickly away. Richard sprang forward to reach her side, but she quickened her pace so that he could not catch up with her. She hurried through the crowded traffic in the direction of the Bestfeld bridge, running ever faster. Richard found that it was more and more difficult to move at all, but on the bridge she halted and he approached her slowly, terribly slowly. Before he could reach her she had moved on again. The bridge stretched endlessly before him—it seemed to span eternity. He tried to run. He struggled to make his legs move forwards, but they would scarcely move at all. While she was running with all her strength, a snail would have moved quicker than he: he seemed not to move from the spot on which he stood, while she hastened ever away and away. Now her form was barely visible to him and now she had disappeared. A terrifying fear possessed him. His heart beat wildly. He fought for breath as he struggled to move, yet without moving, forward.

Richard started up with fright from his bed.

A tug was thudding and panting upstream. Its siren howled. The rain beat upon the window. The candle,

which had burned down to a little stump, was nearly out and the room was almost in darkness. Now there was not enough light for him to write. His heart still beat rapidly, shaken by the terror of his dream; his trembling hands reached out towards the paper, pen and ink. Then the dying candle flared up brighter than before, but the wick fell over and the candle went out.

Too late! he thought, raging inwardly against the blackness of the late October night. Not till the grey of dawn did he fall asleep.

That night Elisabeth was at a party given by the manager and his wife in celebration of their golden wedding. It was the first time that she had left her dwelling since Frederick's departure. The old couple's invitation was one which, she felt, she could not refuse; but her demeanour was so serious and reserved that the white-haired hostess twice besought her to be cheerful.

"My dear child," the old lady said, "I have thought about you so much lately, and—why shouldn't I tell you?—have often talked with my husband about you. I don't want to intrude upon your private life, but there is one thing I wish for you; rather, there is some advice I should like to give you: I think it would be good for you to get married again."

"For the fourth time?" Elisabeth returned, smiling wearily.

"No, for the last time!" The old lady's benevolent and childlike face beamed with contentment and inward peace; she pressed Elisabeth's hand sympathetically as the latter closed her eyes and breathed: "It will never happen again!"

After midnight there was dancing and wine was handed round. At one o'clock the party broke up. One of Eric Zamell's former business friends saw Elisabeth to her home. As they were passing through the lane behind the town hall,

331

the man suddenly asked her to marry him. Ever since Eric's death he had been determined to ask her. He loved her and would agree to whatever Elisabeth might stipulate. Perhaps the time had now arrived when he could confess to her that, in short, he loved her. He was the owner of a chemical factory, and the merging of the two concerns, her factory and his own, would be an admirable commercial union. If she should not feel able to give him an answer at once and on the spot, he begged her to let him know the next day whether he had the right to hope.

Elisabeth told him to put such thoughts out of his head. Her words offended him. He turned his coat collar up round his ears and, walking slowly beside her, went on to say that he was no longer young but a man without illusions. For women he felt nothing at all. Yet when he looked at

her his heart burned violently and wildly. She was to forgive him for his inability to find better words with which to tell her how much ...

Elisabeth stopped at the end of the lane and said that as she wanted to go towards the market she must turn back. So they retraced their steps until they reached the little lane that led to the market-place. Here she stopped once more, intending to say good-bye.

The man hesitated, then asked whether she had already promised her hand to someone else. If that were so, then naturally he was bound ... but he hoped it was not the case.

Elisabeth shook him and his wooing off as if he were some annoying insect. She hurried across the market-place towards the house in which Richard had lodged. She was startled to see that a light was burning in his room. She called his name aloud with a feeling in which terror, joy and pain were mingled. The window on the third floor was opened; a strange face looked down into the street

332

and asked some question. Elisabeth fled, not heeding what was shouted after her except to hurry still faster. Her feet took the road towards the Bestfeld bridge. She felt that someone was following her, that eyes were grasping at her from behind. She broke into a run. She knew now what was following her: it was the spectre which, at the ferryhouse in that night of storm, had borne her, locked in Richard's arms, to her death.

Half-way across the bridge she stopped, her breath failing. The river rushed by in the cold night. A terror of loneliness, of forsakenness, came upon her; she ran across the bridge and through the suburb that lay opposite Lammsdorf until, passing the last houses, she reached the high road to Bestfeld. She ran and ran as fast as her feet could carry her. A motor with glaring headlights was coming towards her. As she fluttered like a butterfly into the beam of light she stumbled and fell. The car pulled up with a screeching of brakes. A man sprang out, picked her up and carried her to the car. With a roar the car resumed its journey towards Lammsdorf.

"Whatever is the matter, Frau Elisa?" the man asked, his arm around her.

Elisabeth could smile even after her terror and panic.

"Your party was so jolly," she answered. "Whose birthday was it really, yours or your wife's?"

The man laughed and held her close to him. As they were passing over the Bestfeld bridge, Elisabeth saw against the blackness of the sky a lighted

candle which, burnt nearly to the end, suddenly flared up and then went out. She shuddered, an icy tremor passing through her body.

“To the market-place,” the man called to the driver.

“Yes,” Elisabeth whispered. “I think so too. I hunger for wherever there is light, music, laughter!”

“I am thirsty for you,” he replied softly.

333

The car rattled along the Langenstrasse. Its headlights shone upon No. 24. Weitner’s old shop with the bronze bowl over the door flashed past. The car pulled up in the market-place. The driver gazed with curiosity after the man and Elisabeth, who were making their way, arm in arm and laughing, into a wine bar.

The next day Richard arrived in Lammsdorf by the night express.

334



## PART EIGHT

335-336

## CHAPTER XLIII

AS Richard made his way from the station he felt immediately that Lammsdorf was somehow different and a strange town to him. He turned into the Langenstrasse, hurried across the market-place and knocked up the landlord of the Swan who had already gone to bed.

"Is that you, Herr Tommsen?"

"Yes, I've come for a few nights. Can you put me up?"

"You shall have your old room—it's vacant."

"Good!" Richard answered. He felt that the room belonged to him, to Tommy Schabeu who had come back again.

There by the window was the chair in which his body had remained inert while he had had those experiences of being "divided." The hour was striking from the cathedral tower in its familiar way, and he could see the illuminated dial of a clock just opposite the chemist's shop in the timber-market.

Overstrained and weary, he got into bed. A shaft of light came obliquely into the room, lighting up the chair which, as before, was so placed that its reflection glowed in the dressing-table mirror. Everything was exactly as it had been and yet was different. There was lacking that glitter, that animation, which had formerly lain upon the face of the world, and he felt that something of magic had gone out of him.

None the less he strove to "divide" himself, and towards morning he reached the ground floor of No. 17 Ringstrasse. Farther than that he could not go. He recoiled from Elisabeth's door; a second time he tried to pass it, but in vain.

Not till midday did he awake. He went downstairs and

337

sat in the bar, waiting for the early twilight. The landlord took a seat beside him and told him the latest piece of Lammsdorf gossip—namely, that Elisabeth had divorced Frederick after only four weeks of married life. Richard received this information with so evident a lack of interest that the landlord asked with disappointment whether he had already heard the news.

"Gossip," Richard said to himself, "gossip—the Lammsdorf mill which the wind never fails, day and night grinding other people's corn."

The landlord was called away, and Richard pulled his hands from his pockets to press them against his temples in which the blood was hammering wildly. What would happen now? Was fulfilment to come at last? His firm resolutions were tottering. It was at last to be! It had to be! Fulfilment would come through Elisabeth! His heart, quickened with desire, beat fiercely against the barriers of reason which, during the summer since his departure from Lammsdorf, he had built up stone by stone round himself. There was now but one thing he could feel: that he must go to her, to Elisabeth! Every minute was precious, every second that brought him nearer to her would be an immeasurable gain.

He jumped up quickly and left the inn. The street lamps were still burning. Now he knew why he was in Lammsdorf. He hurried with long strides, choosing the road that led past the post-office although it was not the shortest way. He paid heed neither to those he met nor to those he overtook. His heart flew on before his body, his eyes gazed into the distance and saw nothing close at hand. An exalted emotion had complete possession of him, an emotion which assured him that he would find her at her home. Never had he felt such certitude as at this moment. The tempestuous desire which carried him so lightly through the darkened streets

338

made him entirely sure that as he loved her so he would reach fulfilment through her.

As he ran his thoughts rose fluttering within him, like birds before a storm, flashes of insight which riveted his gaze second-long upon the far limits of experience. When he crossed the square where, in front of the police-station, he had collided with Elisabeth in the full glare of sunlight, he asked himself, with whom had she since collided? When he turned into the Ringstrasse, taking almost at a bound the little slope at the entrance of the street, he wondered whether the soul of the Recluse were now haunting him. And when his shoulder brushed against a lamp-post, some twenty paces from her door, he fancied it might be a hand to detain him, to hold him back from her.

But these warning thoughts could not delay him. The goal was before his eyes. Like an arrow his heart was flying towards Elisabeth's. He sprang up the steps to her flat. The bell sounded. He knew that note which had been destined to wake an old echo in his heart on that day when, with a

wild expectancy, he had first made Elisabeth's acquaintance. The maid opened the door and with a smile led him into the room.

There Elisabeth was sitting, huddled in the corner of the sofa, pale, weary-eyed, like an ailing woman. She did not rise. She did not speak. And he remained standing by the door which the maid had closed behind him. Too late! He knew it instantaneously as he looked into her eyes. She held out her hand to him, but in such a way that it seemed rather a gesture of defence. Yet he took the icy hand, pressed his lips to it and placed it against his heart. There was in him a strength which, having over-exerted itself, neither wooed nor hoped. She turned her head away, avoiding his gaze. He stood there, minute after minute, until she looked at him once more.

339

"You meant to come to me, to-night or in the morning. I have felt it," she said, "I have bewitched you. Eric is dead. What do *you* want from me?" Her eyes blazed. Richard saw the fiery light which sparkled at him like secret hatred. He did not answer.

Then she said:

"I have waited for you day and night. You did not come—you have forsaken me. Now you come too late!"

He still remained silent. She jumped up and stood threateningly before him, her clenched hands trembling with excitement. It was not that she wanted to strike or to defend herself against this man, the commands of whose heart she was fated somehow or other to obey. She felt, she knew that he was bidding her follow him along a path which she could not tread, a path from which she had turned aside, no matter where it might have led her. She was determined to rebel against the compulsion with which he confronted her.

"Eric is dead!" she shouted once more, as though she might thereby unnerve him and defeat his will-power. Then, suddenly, she ran to the corner of the room, calling as she fled: "I am afraid of you! Leave me alone! Go away from me!"

None the less she stretched out her hand to him so that he might grasp it; and against her own will there broke from her a pitiful cry: "Help me, Richard, do help me!" She rushed towards him, flung herself against him, trembling, quivering, repeating her cry until he took her in his arms and carried her to the sofa, where she sank down in an access of weeping. He kissed her hands and brow, caressed her shapely head. He knew that she

had surrendered to him, that she was entirely at his mercy. Yet he knew no less surely that for her, in this moment of ecstasy, the surrender was no sacrifice, for she was bound to answer when the earthliness of the world knocked at her heart: to renounce that

340

earthliness she must renounce her heart also. And he realised more clearly, more indubitably, than ever before that it was for him to make the sacrifice, to renounce his burning desire of fulfilment through her.

An unspeakable anguish pierced deeply into his soul: there was no salvation possible for him except through renunciation. She listened to him while proud and unfaltering words sprang from his bleeding heart and summoned both her and himself to steel themselves for the harsh and bitter necessity of that renunciation.

Her heart would have cried out in fear of the approaching agony. But, seeing the moist shimmer of his eyes and quickened by the courage of his words, she was overwhelmed by the comforting emotion of their common fate: for him too this life was hard. A wave of exultant happiness surged through her.

341

## CHAPTER XLIV

THE splendour of late autumn lingered everywhere. It was as though nature could not make an end of its festival.

Elisabeth and Richard spent day after day wandering over the hills. A strange harmony possessed her soul: the world of men was remote and meaningless. Day by day Richard felt more deeply the joy of victory: her heart seemed utterly obedient to him. Their emotions were those of a tender and chaste comradeship wherein all their desires found aim and purpose. Never had Elisabeth lived through such entrancing days, never had her experience been more richly blessed. That these days might continue was the hope, unavowed but not needing to be over-timid, which stirred in both their hearts.

Yet a day came for Richard when a doubt, like a seedling sprouting from the ground, sprang up in him. Might not his recently conquered desire for her be lurking in the serenity of this life by her side, a disguised and more dangerous form of his longing for fulfilment through her? That evening he took leave of her earlier than usual and sat in his bare room, unable to suppress the amorous thoughts which had begun to dwell upon the woman rather than the comrade.

The next day a spark from these burning thoughts dropped into Elisabeth's heart. They were sitting in the little garden of an inn which looked from the west over the town; the garden was crowded, for the mild weather had brought many townspeople into the open air, and strangers were sharing their table. To talk freely was out of the question; consequently they gave themselves up more readily to the charm of the view that lay before them.

342

Suddenly Elisabeth became aware that Richard was staring at her face. At length she turned to him with embarrassment and, meeting his eyes, flushed with the recollections of past days. But before she could realise the significance of a discovery which ran like a warm stream in her veins, he had seized her hand and pressed it passionately. The following moment he rose to his feet, hastily paid the bill, and hurried her away, through the rows of packed tables, into a wood close by.

The mild sunshine was piercing through the over-arching screen of branches which day by day were revealing more of the sky. Dead foliage from the boughs overhead fluttered through the calm air and accompanied the sound of their footsteps on the carpet of withered leaves. A faint chill was rising from the ground. Arm in arm and hand in hand they walked on in silence. They did not look at one another, but the pressure of their clasp increased as though that were the sole remaining way of expressing their emotion. Thus joined by an inexpressible bond of nearness, they continued to walk for almost an hour, until Richard suddenly lengthened his step, as if impatient, and pulled Elisabeth along with him. Then, his left hand grasping at the air, he broke the silence:

“Look at the sky, Elisabeth! Look at the falling leaves. How brightly the stars will shine to-night! Oh, the earth is beautiful! Autumn is the state of grace wherein the earth finds its salvation. Life is dying—yet there is no death. Between life and life stands death, at once the annihilator and creator. I am sure that we do not pass away. You will remain for ever—and that is wonderful!”

He strode forward with such speed that Elisabeth found difficulty in keeping up with him. He dragged her along, making for every clearing from which his vision could range unimpeded to the sky, the valley and the river. A mood of boisterous high spirits possessed him, a feeling of masterful

343

energy which drew its strength from the diffused radiance of the hour. It was the first denial of renunciation—an intoxication, a rapture born of renunciation yet nourished by the pulsing life of desire.

Elisabeth was enchanted by his mood. She felt that everything he said had originated within her own being and was his by her endowment. Jubilant and exulting, she strode by his side and experienced in surrendering herself to his care-free spirit the highest happiness of which she felt herself capable. Her face began to glow with an unaccustomed loveliness. Her eyes blazed with the ardour of a love which she was ready and longing to bestow.

“How I should like to fly!” he cried. “Yes, with you!” she answered. He saw how beautiful she was, saw that mind and emotion had fused into one within her, and that from the perfect harmony of soul and body she had become a being of individual significance to him, drawn to him, wholly

surrendered to him. That was the fulfilment he had desired. Such she was meant to be. He had led her to himself. This hour, this radiant day, was the fruit of his victory.

Reluctant to turn back towards the town, they wandered onwards till the sun sank and the stars came out in the fading sky. In one of the villages they shared a simple meal. Then they turned homewards through the night, held closely in one another's arms.



## CHAPTER XLV

**R**ICHARD locked the door of his room and flung himself fully dressed upon the bed. The sounds of dance music came from the café opposite.

His hand had held hers, his arm had encircled her body! “Elisabeth!” he cried and smothered the passionate cry in his pillow. What a parting that had been outside her house! How her face had clouded with sadness, how her body had quivered! He had misjudged himself in believing that he could renounce her and still be so close to her. That night of wandering had been a fierce torture. The blood still raged in his veins. His heart ached rebelliously against the blasphemy of renunciation. He sat up on the bed. He had found the right words to express what he meant: renunciation was death.

Like a wild beast escaping from its cage suppressed longing broke loose in him—longing for Elisabeth, the woman full of warmth and passion. Never had she seemed to him so lovely, so given into his hands, so destined to him from the beginning of the world. From the midst of a thousand perils, from years of yearning and distress, she had saved up for him these coming hours of limitless surrender. Like a fruit ripened in the sunshine of passion she was waiting for the wind: and was he to be a wind so faint, so timorous, that she would be left hanging on the tree when he had passed? “No, no!” he cried, “you shall be mine, Elisabeth. I love you!”

And he determined to go to her. His reason was weak against the burning desire to be near her beauty. He strove to “divide” himself, to separate himself from himself, but his spirit was too earthly fettered. He tossed sleeplessly

345

through the long, dark night. In an agony of impatience he waited for the daylight, and when the first grey of dawn lightened the sky he rose and hastened to her.

She was not yet out of bed, but got up immediately. He waited in the sitting-room until she appeared, and they breakfasted together. A change had come over her since the previous day. She joked and laughed, but without that exalted earnestness of comradeship which yesterday had

glowed in her face. She was, indeed, still beautiful; but she had become once more the woman whom he had wanted to strike when he had first seen her, airily crossing the square in front of the police-station and walking straight towards him as though she had been unaware of his existence.

He felt that her high-spirited chatter was intolerable. He interrupted her bewitching laughter unceremoniously and asked what had happened to Eric's papers. She avoided answering and spoke of the previous day: how beautiful it had been although the leaves had already fallen from the trees.

Once more he asked about Eric's papers. She left his question still unanswered and besought him to excuse her while she went to change her dress. In a few minutes she returned, wearing the same costume as on that day when they had collided in front of the police-station in the square.

After lunch it began to rain and they remained in her sitting-room. At four o'clock they went to the town, where she had some purchases to make. As they crossed the market-place she asked him to come with her into a café close by. He agreed reluctantly, and they sat down beside the window, listening to the orchestra, which was playing sentimental airs. Then she told him that this was the place where, in defiance of Eric's wishes, she had been accustomed to sit with the Recluse years before; and she continued to chatter about those vanished years as though Richard had asked her to tell him all about them.

346

He felt uneasy in her presence, though she was, he recognized, as beautiful as ever. Suddenly he suspected that she was aware of his discomfort and unrest. Yes, he felt sure that she was challenging him. He gazed at her face and knew that his suspicion was correct. With a feeling of terror he hurried her back to her home and left her on the doorstep, ignoring her invitation to remain.

That evening he watched her house from the pavement opposite. A light was burning in her bedroom; her shadow moved across the curtain, for she was wandering restlessly about her room. He stood rooted to the spot. For hours, it seemed, she passed and re-passed the window, moving from side to side like an animal behind the bars of its cage.

He thought of the night when he had stood with the Recluse before the same house. What Elisabeth had told him in the café recalled to him pictures of the past in which his own and Eric's experiences were strangely confused. All at once he saw himself standing a few paces away with head

pushed forward and eyes staring at the lighted window; and he knew that this man must be Tommy Schabeu, who was attracted by the lights that burned beside a corpse.

This vision of himself held him spellbound and he did not notice the people who hurried past him in the cold night—for the wind had veered to the north and was blowing violently down the street. Nor did he see that a man had been observing him closely for some minutes, and he was startled when a hand touched him on the shoulder.

“Frau Zamell has been running up and down like that for several nights,” the stranger said. “Look, she’s like the pendulum of a clock. Are you going back towards the town?”

“Yes.” The two men set off down the Ringstrasse, the wind blowing at their backs.

“I am a clockmaker,” the stranger remarked, “that’s why I said she was like a pendulum. There’s something

347

I’d like to tell you: the devil knows how it happened, but when I saw you standing there I said to myself: ‘Good God! that’s Eric Zamell!’ You had exactly his way of standing—head pushed expectantly forward. He was always waiting for something, was Eric Zamell. He was a good husband, they say. Shortly before his death he too started that pendulum business—every evening up and down the veranda of his house. As a matter of fact I was living at that time in a house at the back of his place and our gardens met in between. That’s how I happened to notice the way he was behaving.”

Richard did not answer. He parted company with the clockmaker outside the police-station.

That night Richard dreamed that Elisabeth was dying.

348

## CHAPTER XLVI

FOR three weeks after that dream Richard avoided Elisabeth. Then he received a letter from her:

“Your unrest has made me suffer even more acutely than your aim. I know that you have been near to me evening after evening, and you know why you have kept away from me. Must I tell you that I am entirely yours and that therefore you need not avoid me? I am in your hands, ready to go wherever you will lead me. When you are restless I am restless too, yes, in spite of my knowledge of us both, in spite of what I feel and desire. When you are at peace, so too am I, regardless of thought and feeling. And when you will it, even my longing for you is stilled, although it does not die. You have demanded that we renounce one another, and I have agreed. Now come and tell me whether you demand it in your own or Eric’s name. For even though, in my secret heart, I know the answer, yet you must tell it to me so that I may be able to help you. Whatever you decide I shall abide by it. I am your woman in soul and mind, in heart and senses. I am as ready to be yours in the one as in the other, or in both together. But you dare not hesitate lest I should hesitate too. You will find me determined to follow you wherever you may lead me, yes, although I know already the road that I must go. If you are still uncertain what that road may be, come to me and I will tell you.”

Richard hurried as quickly as he could to No. 17 Ringstrasse. The maid opened the door and showed him into Elisabeth’s bedroom. She lay upon her bed, her head sunk in the pillows. Her face was earnest, wan and shrunk. Her

349

eyes, unnaturally big and bright, were turned steadily towards him. A faint smile played round her haggard mouth as he fell on his knees beside her bed and, taking her emaciated but still delicate hand, held it to his lips. At first there was no word that either could say. Richard had to force back his tears when at length Elisabeth asked faintly:

“In whose name do you demand renunciation?”

And as he could not answer for sheer pain of heart and soul, she whispered:

“Only tell me, Eric, that I have obeyed well.”

Again she gave him a strange and delicate smile, caressing his head with her trembling hand. They gazed at each other steadily; their eyes were ablaze with happiness—the rays seemed to pass backwards and forwards along the path of their glances.

That night he would not leave her side. They spoke seldom. A boundless peace had settled upon their souls. Time had ceased to flow.

Towards morning her voice was weaker. She still called him Eric and asked him to go to her child. He obeyed with reluctance and sat down upon the boy's bed, gazing at the young rosy face. The boy awoke and called tearfully for his mother. Richard tried in vain to comfort him. Then, seized with a foreboding, he hurried back to Elisabeth's room and, crying bitterly, flung himself on his knees before the dead woman. Time stood still. It was as if he were weeping for Angelica, for whose death he had, till then, shed no tear. Past and present were mingled within him.

There he remained a long time, his lips pressed to Elisabeth's hand. The sun was rising.

Three days later, when Elisabeth was laid to rest by Eric's side, the bells of the cathedral gave forth their

350

peculiar sound. That evening Richard said farewell to her child.

He was about to leave the house and stood in meditation on the landing. Then he bent down and brushed his trousers as though to remove the dust of a long journey.

With the night express he travelled away from Lammsdorf.

THE END

351

Printed in Great Britain at  
*The Mayflower Press, Plymouth.*  
William Brendon & Son, Ltd.

